

Policy Literacy and Academic Remediation:
Fields of Power in Developmental English and the Community College
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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the role and influence of state, federal, and institutional policies in the experiences of developmental students and instructors enrolled in, or teaching at, community colleges. Through the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu's relational sociology and Field Theory, I organized and examined narratives and interviews from students, dropouts, and instructors at one community college. These narratives and interviews worked to articulate participants' positions in related fields of power as they navigated the complexities of academic bureaucracies like financial aid, admissions, and enrollment. Particular attention was paid to the ways in which financial aid and college remediation interact. The data from both groups revealed that policy implementation has marked influence on classroom experience, even when—and perhaps because—instructors and students are unaware of the specific and particular policies themselves. The data revealed that both students and instructors make decisions based on faulty or flawed understandings of academic policies. Based on these understandings, I recommend policy literacy programs for both students and instructors and call for greater policy transparency so that students may navigate complex bureaucracies at community colleges and be better prepared to self-advocate for best practices.

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Dedication

To all of the students like those at South Pine Community College, struggling to find their place.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

My father worked as a pit crew manager at Watkins Glen racetrack, just south of the Finger Lakes in upstate New York. When he wasn't working, he'd fallen into the hobby of photographing the cars with a 35mm camera. Stock cars at Watkins Glen regularly break 100 miles per hour, making photographing them nearly impossible, so as a child I was mesmerized by how he could suspend a single car in motion, while the asphalt, the greenery, and the other cars were reduced to abstract shapes and blurred streaks of color. As an adult, I asked him how he did it. He said, somewhat casually, "Follow the patterns."

It may be hard to imagine, but when 40 stock cars race around an oval at 90-200 miles per hour, patterns do emerge. It's the only way the drivers can keep from crashing into one another, and it's the slight maneuvers that allow them to pass one another. Racing, I came to realize, was more about learning those patterns than it was about speeding down the track. Photography was about knowing how to use them.

In the strangest of ways, these conversations and those photographs came to frame my understanding of how many students perceive the college experience. Over the course of my career in college remediation, both as a student and an instructor, I have observed the community college's own set of patterns emerge. Patterns and relationships between students and faculty, between faculty and administration, and patterns between pedagogy and policies. Throughout this project, I liken these relationships to traffic patterns. I find this metaphor useful, as it captures both the complexity and the violence of the college experience, while phrasing it in language accessible to the common person—something many colleges and their policies fail to execute adequately.

The "traffic" of college remediation is, in many ways, like Jane Jacob's (1992) vision of the city "as a ballet." Jacobs imagined a sort of organized chaos—a mess to the untrained eye—

but to those who know where to look, she revealed a highly engineered system with a clear and conscious mission: to create flow and community but with the propensity to support oppression and inequity. I have only come to understand this sort of organized chaos after living through it once as a student, then as an instructor, and now as a researcher. I realize how my experiences as a remedial student fold into my perspectives as a remedial instructor, and in turn into my biases as a researcher. The questions that follow are equally and ultimately informed by each of these experiences.

These questions could not have been asked without first consulting my individual investment in such a study. Here, the sociological theories of Pierre Bourdieu (1997), whose ideas about field, capital and habitus raised doubt about the rarely-questioned benevolent nature of higher education. Similarly, in order to confront questions of administration, policy, and funding, I draw heavily on the concept of commensuration as defined by Wendy Espeland (1998).

Because of this, I sought to better understand how underrepresented students enrolled in remedial English courses at community colleges *experience* policy implementation, how departmental, institutional, state, and even federal policy decisions impact a student's experience. In order to do so, I constructed a study which, instead of analyzing the impact of these studies, considers how these decisions influence a student's sense of self, relationship to higher education, and beliefs and attitudes about their own academic success. In short, this dissertation examines how students and instructors in developmental English courses at community colleges experience the implementation of higher education policies.

Statements of the Problem

As I come to think about the problems plaguing remediation and community colleges, I am forced to remember that they are not simply abstractions. They were the problems with which

I wrestled, with which my friends wrestled. I remember the conversations I had with my parents, fighting to understand the details and conditions of PLUS loans and FAFSA. I think about the embarrassment of remediation and remember how demoralizing it was to be asked to pay for it. But these problems are not only my own, and many more have it much, much worse. The students I teach, and some of the participants in this study, are living through these realities today. In the section that follows, I do my best bridge these connections, to recognize and confront my own personal and emotional investment in these issues while also presenting the more generalizable social and political trends. As a means of doing this, I've chosen to divide this section into three problem statements: my problems as a community college student, the problems I observe as a community college instructor, and the problems I confront as an education researcher.

A Statement of the Problem as a Student

By the time I was 19 years old, I'd already dropped out of community college twice. I like to write the first time off to immaturity, laziness, and more than a little oppositional defiance, but the second time was more complicated. I was young, performing regularly in a punk rock band, and failing my freshman writing class. I was assigned John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* alongside an excerpt from Marcel Proust's existentialist tome, *In Search of Lost Time*. I was admittedly interested in both of the works, but only by title. They spoke to some adolescent sense of nihilism and my own budding existential inquiries, but the classroom did little to foster those interests. I never read the books, and when I started failing my papers I simply stopped showing up.

I took my first community college pre-assessment exam over the summer of 2006, placing into freshman composition and developmental mathematics. I did not know the

difference. I figured “freshman” and “developmental” meant the same thing, never realizing the latter was a form of remediation, “SPED” as we so insensitively called it in high-school. I enrolled part-time and for 6 “billable contact hours.” *What the hell does this mean?* My math course met at 8am, which meant I had to catch the 6:40 bus to the college to get there on time. *No way.* I attended that class once. My English class, however, met at four o’clock in the afternoon, leaving next to no excuse for missing it.

I do not remember much about my writing instructor. I don’t remember her name or even what she looked like, but I remember her handwriting. It was perfect, and that was intimidating. It represented some sort of cultural divide. She returned our papers in reverse alphabetical order by last name, which meant I had to wait until the end of the pile. I watched her cursive flash across the pages as my classmates flipped through their papers, searching for their marks. *My papers are always last.* I wondered if that meant she read my paper first, or if she read it last. I wondered how that might have affected her commentary, her grading.

I don’t remember my grades—only that I failed. I’d already stopped attending my math class, and I was only enrolled part-time, so failing English—a language I supposedly spoke—was particularly demoralizing. I remember thinking, *I have nothing left to fail.* Mercifully, and in my best interest, my math instructor offered me a withdrawal rather than an “F,” but I failed freshman composition. I wouldn’t learn that until I re-enrolled the following spring. “Dropping a course,” at least to me, meant simply not attending. *There was a form for that?* “Withdrawals” were for bank slips and recovering addicts. What did I know? I never followed any formal processes, sought out any academic assistance, or contacted any administrative offices, and I definitely never spoke to my instructors. It would take me two more attempts and thousands of

dollars in student loan debt to pass first year writing and first year mathematics at the community college. It took me almost 3 years to simply enroll as a full-time student.

It is worth recognizing that I graduated high-school from a non-traditional learning environment. Today, these places are called “opportunity schools.” My classmates were living and learning with various intellectual, developmental, and learning disabilities, while others were recently released from juvenile detention centers or discharged from adolescent psychiatric facilities. Many were expelled from their local high-schools for a variety of disciplinary or conduct infringements. In retrospect it is clear that these were the students for whom the primary educational system failed. Ultimately, I graduated amongst a class of less than 40. To my knowledge, I am the only one to have graduated from college.

Still, community college was never the plan, at least not according to my teachers and my advisors. I met with a VESID (Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities) counselor in my senior year of high school. I remember that he spoke over me, to my mother and my father, as if I were not seated at the table. “College is out of the question,” he said. I’d already considered joining the Navy, enrolling in an audio technician program, or trying to make it with my band, but it was my parents who, against the advice of every VESID counselor and every high school instructor, believed I could graduate from college. Six years later, I did. I earned a teaching fellowship and full-funding for my Master’s degree at SUNY New Paltz, where I immediately began working with developmental students, a population who, as I would quickly come to learn, were wildly unpopular with teaching faculty, researchers, and administration and were just as bewildered by the congestion and traffic of college as I had been.

A Statement of the Problem as an Instructor

Many of the same problems I witnessed as a student still seem to persist today, namely that students relegated to college remediation disproportionately represent working class and minority demographics and that they rarely lack the requisite cognitive abilities to succeed in freshman coursework—despite the social construction of “remediation.” Still, these students are disadvantaged in other ways.

Few tenured instructors have much interest in teaching remedial courses, so most community colleges adopt a seniority policy wherein priority course choice goes to instructors with the most experience. Most opt not to take remedial courses as part of their teaching load, so most of the sections go to adjuncts, many of whom graduate from programs in literature, have little experience in composition, and no experience in pedagogy. Almost none of them have experience with special-education. Although it isn’t fair to say that *all* remedial students get *all* of the most inexperienced, or worst instructors, based on my observations, I’d say the lion’s share do go to adjuncts, and I only know a handful of adjuncts with an academic background in composition studies. Studies have borne out my observations. According to the higher education department of the American Federation of Teachers, as of 2008, 53% of courses at community colleges are taught by part-time faculty (Lee, 2008).

In addition to the questionable quality of many remedial courses, few of the students I have observed in such courses recognize the economic implications of remediation, financial aid, their academic standing, or even of college in general. Most are fully unaware of how they are paying for college in the first place. So few of these students possess any understanding of the processes and procedures of higher education, and even fewer recognize that higher education is more than content and curricular knowledge, that it’s more about social and cultural

understandings, which—of course—can be taught, but are more often *inherited*. So few students realize that the deck is already stacked against them.

Coming to the intersection: Community colleges, financial aid, and remediation

I have come to understand the first-year experience for many first generation and underrepresented students as a sort of intersection, full of traffic congestion, milling pedestrians, unpredictable detours, and the ever-present signal changes. While most students can navigate these obstacles one at a time, the intersection presents a unique set of overlapping problems, like a right on red into rush-hour traffic. In the worst-case scenarios, these obstacles, and sometimes the drivers, collide and ricochet through the intersection turning what seems like nothing more than a fender-bender into a ten-car pileup. For example, taking more time to focus on remedial coursework might result in an expedited drain of financial aid dollars, while college acceleration programs could mean that remedial students speed through their studies but are not receiving the individualized attention or precious time afforded to many of their more traditional counterparts. It seems as though, for many remedial students, every positive action, every maneuver, has a negative—and oftentimes expensive—reaction. While navigating this intersection is hard for everyone, it seems as though remedial students are driving into head-on traffic.

Freshman composition represents just one of the lanes of the intersection, remediation another—both of which intersect in different ways with the traffic coming from community colleges, financial aid, home life, and a wide range of other non-cognitive issues. It might be appropriate then to think of freshman writing, remedial or otherwise, as a proverbial warning sign, representing trouble long before it means dropping out or failing classes. The problem comes when only a select few know where to look for those signs.

For example, let's imagine a student who enrolls in a remedial writing course. This student will be responsible for paying for three additional credit hours, plus any number of other additional fees and charges, depending on the school and the semester. These three credit hours may not initially seem like much, especially when they are covered by grants, scholarships, or loans, but they may prematurely exhaust students' financial aid package, leaving them without the necessary funding at the end of their sequence or program.

What often happens is a sort of collision in this intersection. Students ignoring or wholly unaware of the signals coming from financial aid may run the light. Students in the wrong lane may look toward the wrong signals. Part of the problem is the fact that there is an intersection of problems in the first place. Much of this plays out, or at least begins to play out, in the freshman writing course—a course notorious for its high attrition rates, inexperienced instructors, ineffective pedagogies, and dry, laborious content. All of this considered, who could blame us for missing the signs so early on? What can we do to better time the lights? In the sections that follow, I illustrate how the conclusions I've drawn from my participants' experiences is supported by research into remediation at community colleges.

Academic Statement of the Problem

For many working-class families, college represents the most viable track toward upward social mobility; it is the best way to “make it” (Belfield & Bailey, 2011). Parents send their children on the promise of a better life, for better jobs, and to have it easier than they did. Students take out loans based on a belief in a return in dividends, and more often than not they enroll at community colleges where tuition is cheaper, and admission is all but guaranteed, rarely considering material realities like the conditions of their loans, the transferability of their credits, or the requirements of their programs (Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013). Many of them work

hard, and many of them perform well, but only few of them graduate or transfer (Bailey, 2009). Only a few will end up “making it,” but this rarely reflects an intrinsic deficit in intellectual or academic ability (Adams, Gearhardt, Miller, et al., 2009).

Even if a student “makes it” to enrolling in a baccalaureate degree program, the truth remains that community colleges serve dual and contradictory missions of segregating students from more prestigious colleges and universities as well as provide educational opportunities for students who probably wouldn’t have such opportunities otherwise (Dougherty, 1994).

Understood simply, community colleges serve to both grant access to education for underrepresented student populations while also preserving the privilege of students selected for more prestigious colleges and universities.

Such stratification is exacerbated by the current trend toward delegating remediation exclusively to public two-year colleges, a move colorfully described as “academic apartheid” by the prominent critical education theorist, and CUNY professor, Ira Shor (1990). As it stands today, and according to research collected by the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University, about a third of incoming freshman take some form of remedial coursework—those courses required for students with unsatisfactory placement or pre-enrollment exams. Of that group, the overwhelming majority enroll in multiple remedial courses, but only a few will pass any of their remedial courses on the first attempt (Bailey, 2009).

This is not a new phenomenon. College remediation has been an obstacle for disenfranchised and underrepresented students since at least The City University of New York first experimented with open admissions policies in 1970 (Shaughnessy, 1977). This policy, while initially celebrated for its egalitarian and equalizing nature, was later revealed to be an

unfettered disaster. In the words of Mina Shaughnessy, the students who were admitted into the CUNY system were

... the true outsiders. Natives, for the most part, of New York, graduates of the same public school system as the other students, they were nonetheless strangers in academia, unacquainted with the rules and rituals of college life, unprepared for the sorts of tasks their teachers were about to assign them. Most of them had grown up in one of New York's ethnic or racial enclaves. Many had spoken other languages or dialects at home and never successfully reconciled the worlds of home and school, a fact which by now had worked its way deep into their feelings about school and about themselves as students. (Shaughnessy, 1977, p. 2-3)

Such students lack not the intellectual ability to succeed in college but rather what Pierre Bourdieu called “cultural capital,” the “know-how” or experience in the domain of higher education that makes college success not only possible but expected (Swartz, 1997, p. 87).

With no scholarly forum to discuss the issues associated with remedial writing, no textbooks to outline theories or approaches to teaching remedial writing, and faculty wholly inexperienced and unprepared to teach courses in remedial writing, only 30% of the students admitted under CUNY’s open admissions policies would ever graduate with their degrees, while less than 25% of minority students admitted under CUNY’s open admissions policies would complete their programs (Lavin & Hyllegard, 1996).

It is my understanding that these material realities come to represent the aforementioned proverbial intersection, as a place where social, material, psychological, economic, and academic issues collide. When financial aid policies intersect and overlap with the practice of remediation at community colleges, students can be lost in a bureaucratic system, especially students from underrepresented populations. My experiences as a community student, a community college instructor, and now as an educational researcher lead me to ask the following question: How do these intersections influence underrepresented students’ experiences, and what can we do about it?

Research Questions

The aforementioned problems raise the following questions about how best to facilitate learning, and improve persistence, completion, and transfer for freshman and remedial writers at community colleges. As students enter this complex intersection, their own bewildering roundabouts, the proverbial question becomes: *How do we time the lights?* With so many moving parts, so many overlapping elements, I wonder how we might synchronize them. We might also question what happens when financial aid policy and remediation overlap in community colleges and specifically in the remedial English classroom? The correlation between these competing elements remains under-researched, and a better understanding of how the material constraints impacting a student's experience interact with their academic performance and cultural capital might yield results for developing more effective policies and pedagogies for remedial students at community colleges.

More specifically, we might consider how student experience in freshman English—remedial or otherwise—transacts with persistence and completion rates at the community colleges, how a student's first year English experience impacts their feelings about college and their sense of identity as a student. Such questions may ultimately lead to considering the role of both policy-makers and pedagogues. How can these two work together to produce meaningful and effective changes?

At heart of this study, I considered the following questions:

- How do financial aid policy, community college policies, and the practice of remediation, intersect and overlap in the lives of affected students?
- How do such policies affect instruction of developmental English classes?

- How might policy decisions influence a student's decision about attending college in ways other than reported in quantitative measures?

Setting the Course: An Introduction to the Study

A project like this is necessarily indebted to the hard work of countless theorists and scholars, none more so than Mina Shaughnessy, who reported on the City University of New York's open admissions experiment in her foundational text, *Errors and Expectations*.

Shaughnessy, like the students she wrote about, was an outsider in academia. She never earned her doctorate, and her interests in college composition, particularly amongst remediation made her something of an exception amongst her colleagues at CUNY. She was, in many ways, recognized by her colleagues as an inferior.

Introducing this study first means empathizing with those outsiders, with those who have been made to feel inferior at the community college. This study is chiefly concerned with how students experience policy implementation and specifically how that plays out in their remedial coursework and the first-year writing class at the community college. Particular attention is paid to how a variety of non-cognitive or material conditions overlap and intersect to affect and impact a student's perception of college and of themselves during remediation and the first-year writing course.

This study necessarily draws from multiple disciplines including higher education policy, English composition, pedagogy, economics, and sociology, though its context is decidedly and intentionally rooted in the lived experience and narrative history of individual students, as a means to best explore how the various and myriad elements at play in any given student's college experience might intersect, overlap, or collide. Because of this, this is decidedly not a

quantitative study, though its significance lies in the subjective “truths” of the students and populations interviewed and questioned.

Data was collected through a variety of qualitative methods with current community college students, former community college students, and community college instructors as a means to generate a holistic portrait of how the intersection is complicated for, and navigated by, many underrepresented students. Participants were asked to participate in two semi-structured interviews, and produce narratives prompted by Van Manen’s (2001) lived experience description protocol.

The Research Site

All research data was collected at the South Pine Community College (SPCC) a small commuter campus in suburban New York. This is the same community college I attended, as well as the community college I have taught at. I believe that these layered histories are significant for a qualitative study such as this, particularly because the methodology is rooted in relational sociology, and the theoretical framework is indebted to Field Theory, both of which posit personal experience, and the relationships associated with it, at the center of the research paradigm.

The Research Population

SPCC has recently adopted Peter Adam’s Accelerated Learning Program for many of their remedial writing courses. In order to best represent the remedial writing population, I interviewed and observed both ALP classes and remedial writing courses, and freshman composition courses. The same interview questions and narrative prompts were given to participants regardless of which class they were enrolled in. Participants who had dropped out of

college were previously enrolled at SPCC, and both instructors whom I interviewed currently teach at SPCC.

Significance of the Study

A study like this lives between worlds. It is both public and private. To borrow a phrase from Carol Hanisch (1970), “the personal is the political.” Questions such as those I have raised speak not only to the struggles of individual students but also to a larger social and political architecture. Schools are populated by students; classes are taught by instructors, but these groups rarely have a seat at the table when it comes to discussing public policy initiatives, budgets, and protocol. Even fewer remedial students or remedial instructors have that opportunity.

We are living in an era of unbridled neoliberal policy-making and warring opinions on the role and significance of public higher education. On February 7, 2017, noted educational activist and fierce supporter of privatized education, Betsy DeVos, assumed the role of Secretary of Education under president Donald J. Trump. DeVos is notorious for her instrumental role in implementing a system of private charter schools in the city of Detroit, many of which divert state and federal subsidies away from the public-school system while bloating the private sector.

As it stands, such an appointment sends a clear signal about the United States federal government’s values concerning public colleges and universities. As the country shifts toward a knowledge-economy, college becomes all but necessary for viable and gainful employment (Machlup, 1972). Yet state and federal subsidies to public higher education have been on a sharp decline since the 1980s (Newfield, 2016). More research into the questions surrounding the aforementioned overlapping issues of college remediation, and financial aid policy at the community college might work to develop a deeper understanding of how, and why, we might

work to preserve public higher education in an era of dwindling public subsidies and increasing privatization.

While this study has clear and obvious political implications, it may also hold significance for students, and instructors—many of whom rarely have their “stories told.” It humanizes the statistics and discussions of finance, reminding readers of the humanity at the heart of the college experience. Such a study as this may not argue causality, but it does work to illustrate the authentic and individual experiences of students with respect to remediation and administrative policies at community colleges, an area I believe to be under-researched and critically important given the political and economic shifts in the higher education policy arena over the past thirty years. During this time state and federal support for higher education has dramatically decreased, while the cost and professional necessity of a college education has skyrocketed (Heller, 2013).

It is my ultimate hope that this study can help bridge the divide between pedagogy and policy and invite law-makers, administrators, instructors, and students to the same conversation. Without such a dialogue, college cost will continue to rise, policy will continue to obscure the path for underrepresented students, and a college degree will become a moat separating social classes rather than a bridge between them.

Theoretical Framework

“The moment she told me her nephew went to Yale, I had to choose: Was I a Yale Law student, or was I a Middletown kid with hillbilly grandparents? If the former, I could exchange pleasantries and talk about New Haven's beauty; if the latter, she occupied the other side of an invisible divide and could not be trusted.” – JD Vance

Working class and underrepresented students who make it into higher education often feel as though they are caught living in between worlds and betraying the cultures from which they were born (Sennett & Cobb, 1972). Such a phenomenon may be easily diagnosed by sociologists, but what often goes unwritten or unsaid are the descriptions of how those cultures collide, how their impacts resonate, perhaps for a lifetime, to the tune of the “trance of unworthiness” (Brach, 2004). Mina Shaughnessy (1977) famously described such students as “strangers in academia,” those who struggle not only with their academic content but also to integrate into, as well as navigate, the culture of education.

The quote above, from JD Vance’s timely memoir, *Hillbilly Elegy* presents a frank and candid representation of how people are habituated into certain social schema. For Vance, a working-class veteran from Middletown, Ohio who worked his way into Yale Law School, Yale was an alien landscape rife with the social and cultural capital necessary for migrating from his family’s social and economic classes, but once he had secured those resources, he began to feel like a stranger not only at the university but also amongst his peers back home in Ohio.

That feeling of being a stranger in academia is at the heart of this study, and it is critical to recognize how we might best read such strangeness. While Vance’s memoir explores the space between the rural Midwest and an ivy league law school, his experiences still provide important context for first-generation learners and underrepresented students at community colleges. Of course, there are structural, political, and social forces that make it more difficult for underrepresented students to succeed in our society. Such realities, as they play out in the school, are well-documented. They are represented most clearly at the community college (Dougherty, 1994), (Bailey, 2009), in the practice of academic remediation (Shaughnessy, 1977), (Shor, 1990), and amongst the bureaucracies of financial aid policies and award applications (Dynarski

& Scott-Clayton, 2013). Still, it is often argued that such hurdles can be overcome, a sentiment popularized by the neo-liberal notion of “grit” (Duckworth, 2016). But, if that were really the case, why do these realities still represent such formidable obstacles for so many students? Why is it still only the few who succeed? And perhaps more importantly what happens when students from underrepresented backgrounds are introduced to the college community?

The work of the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu represents a useful theoretical framework for addressing these questions, as his Field Theory takes into consideration both the longitudinal ideological trends (doxa) as well as the methods and translations of these trends as experienced by individuals (habitus). In short, Bourdieu’s work provides a generative frame for best understanding how large bureaucratic initiatives influence individual lives, for understanding how higher education and higher education policy affect individual students. This simple sentiment is the key focus of this dissertation: That policies affect people.

Outlining Bourdieu

Bourdieu’s work is indebted to the Marxist philosophy of Louis Althusser, whose arguments about ideology and the ideological state apparatus sought to explain how social systems are organized via ideological trends. According to Althusser (2010), such systems are organized through power, and power is exercised through two interrelated mechanisms: the repressive state apparatus and the ideological state apparatus. In the former, power is distributed, and order is maintained through the implementation of physical force. The repressive state apparatus is composed of structures like prisons, the police, and the military—all of which maintain order via physical force.

The ideological state apparatus, however, works more subtly. It is coercive rather than threatening. Althusser, echoing Foucault’s (1977) panopticism, understood that power was

distributed best when invisible, through ideology, via structures like churches, art and—perhaps most importantly—schools. In the ideological state apparatus, power molds behaviors, beliefs, and values into a common practice—what Pierre Bourdieu (1997) would come to call a common “doxa.”

Bourdieu’s philosophy departs from Althusser’s, as it increases in complexity and nuance. Implicit in the work of Bourdieu is an understanding of the relationships between various aspects of society, the most important of which Bourdieu calls field, habitus, and capital. Organized into Field Theory, these aspects and the relationships between them represent the core components of a society or social setting. Field Theory, as described by Bourdieu, assumes that society is comprised of a network of complex relationships between agents, structures, and fields. Field Theory allows for the analysis of objects, agents, and context as they stand in relation to one another. In Bourdieu’s terms, *field* represents the social setting wherein events, interactions, or conflicts between agents arise, while *agents* represent the individuals performing roles within a given field. Each agent is informed by *structures* like their education, job, or personal history, which in turn informs their *habitus*, the subculture’s reinforcing influence and ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that affect an agent’s sense of worth, place, and value. Lastly *capital*, in its myriad forms, diversifies an agent’s access and mobility across the field.

As a theoretical framework, Field Theory provides a unique opportunity to consider how agents within the fields operate according to habitus and doxa, while simultaneously recognizing that structure and field also influence an agent’s experience. For this study in particular, the overlapping and dynamic fields of higher education and higher education policy have critical significance in the experiences of students in the structures of remediation and community colleges, as they internalize beliefs about themselves as students in need of repair, while also

attempting to navigate the complexities of structures like administrative offices and academic departments all without the requisite social or cultural capital necessary for best executing logistical tasks.

Field, Higher Education, and The Policy Arena

For Bourdieu, a field is most simply described as a social environment within which we live, where habitus is actualized. When habitus is actualized it takes shape in the form of unconscious dispositions and influences our behaviors in the social world. It provides fertile ground for the production and maintenance of habitus and reproduction of doxa amongst agents within the structure. This has implications beyond the students, as habitus may influence individual students' perception and behavior, the reproduction of doxa gives shape to the overall field of power. In this study, the field of higher education policy maintains typical practices and procedures, (doxa), while the policies themselves have deep implications for individual students (habitus). Bourdieu defines field as:

a field of forces within which the agents occupy positions that statistically determine the positions they will take with respect to the field, these position-takings being aimed either at conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces that is constitutive of the field. (Bourdieu, 2005)

Fields represents the structural order of things. For the purposes of this study, the field of higher education policy represents the setting for social mobility or the preservation of privilege and wealth via social and cultural capitals in university setting. In particular colleges and universities distribute capital in the form of embodied cultural capital via knowledge, taste, and skill, but also as institutionalized capital in the form of degrees, credentials, and certifications. Bourdieu

indicates that agents in the field take positions, informed by their positioning in a habitus, which either maintain or challenge the forces represented in the field.

While a field is most clearly identified as the space within which social interactions occur, it is also a *structured* space, meaning it is organized around a core ideological function. Fields are established to perform some task. David Swartz (1997) best describes Bourdieu's field as a structured space when he argues that "Fields denote arenas of production, circulation, and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge, or status, and the competitive positions help by actors in their struggle to accumulate and monopolize these different kinds of capital." (Swartz, 117). As a structured space, fields allow for the flow of various forms of capital among agents, which may be utilized to either reinforce or challenge the ideological core of the field as a whole.

Colleges, for example, may be theorized as structured fields, as is the higher education policy arena. Their purpose may be to preserve the status of elite and privileged students through institutionalized capital, or it may be to redistribute embodied capital through knowledge or skills for students from lower-socioeconomic status or under-represented demographics. Either way, colleges serve as structured fields in the sense that they provide the space for agents to engage with various forms of capital.

The field of higher education policy represents the space wherein access to myriad forms of cultural, social, and symbolic capital are distributed, attained, or exchanged. The mechanisms for sorting and distributing resources and capital take form most clearly as grants, financial aid, and scholarships, but attaining them in the first place requires a basic level of social and cultural capital or institutional literacy. Agents need to know who and how to ask for these awards.

It is worth noting here that this study concerns two interrelated fields: the field of higher education and the field of higher education policy. In either setting, capital is distributed and

exchanged, but the relationship between these two fields deserves particular attention. The latter grants access to the former, but within either field agents are restricted to structured routes and paths. Access to education, as it is secured through the field of higher education policy steers, coerces, or influences student experience. To put it simply, higher education policy—and the agents behind policy design and enactment—affect a student’s higher education experiences.

Agents, Habitus, and Higher Education

Bourdieu describes agents as individuals within a given field, each with their own strengths, weakness, interests, and capacities. In this study, *agents* refers to the students enrolled in, and the instructors who teach, developmental English coursework at community colleges. Agents in the field are only afforded certain social roles. Their capacities and possibilities are limited by the structure of the field. For example, developmental students are prescribed different social practices than honors students, while students from higher socio-economic standing enjoy more luxury than students from a lower socio-economic status.

According to Bourdieu, agents assume their social roles through the structure of the field, but they are habituated into behaving in ways consistent with the structure and field. Bourdieu defines habitus as “structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices” (1984). Habitus may also be understood as a “subculture,” or the “relatively permanent and largely unconscious ideas about one’s chances of success and how society works that are common to members of a social class or status group” (Swartz, 1997, p. 197).

It is well evidenced that the community college can be both a place of segregation and a place of opportunity, sometimes even contemporaneously (Dougherty, 1994), (Karabel, 1999), (Scherer & Anson, 2014). Accordingly, the first-year writing course is often discussed as a place of self-discovery, though it may also be read as a place to “learn the rules of the game” (Lareau,

2015, p. 2), the jargon, and the conventions of the college. Perhaps more critically, we might come to recognize the community college and, by extension remediation, as a form of “academic apartheid” (Shor, 1990). Regardless of how we envision the community college and the first-year writing course, it is clear that this environment presents a unique opportunity wherein underrepresented and disenfranchised students might first come to challenge their beliefs about themselves, their potential, and their academic trajectory—their habitus. Likewise, there remains a risk that these students might have their feelings of inadequacy or unworthiness reinforced.

For Bourdieu, the perception of the self is as significant as the contexts surrounding it and from which it might emerge. While it should be clear that social and material determinants like socio-economic class, race, and gender all impact the way a student might perceive him or herself amongst the culture of the college, Bourdieu’s notion of habitus also recognizes deep cognitive implications. For Bourdieu, habitus is the “durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations, produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle... as defined by the cognitive and motivating structures making up the habitus” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.78). It should be clear that the community college represents a context that forces many students to internalize beliefs about themselves.

Relevant Forms of Capital

Bourdieu (1977) describes capital as “symbolic power” (p. 159). As such, capital operates in exchange for other valued resources. It can be sold, exchanged, or applied to benefit agents in the structure and the field as they seek to either challenge or support the foundation of the field. Albright (1999) describes that Bourdieu’s concept of capital can be divided into four primary categories: cultural, economic, social, and symbolic:

Cultural capital can be embodied in knowledge, skills and practices that are enacted in the hexis of the subject. It can be objectified in the subject's material goods. And, it can be institutionalized in academic and professional accreditations. Economic capital is the subject's wealth, and social capital is the ease with which the subject can access cultural and social institutions, relations and practices. Symbolic capital enables subjects to exchange one form of capital for another. A subject's cultural, economic or social capital needs to be recognized as valuable within particular fields in order to have value. (p. 74 - 75).

For the purposes of this study, I focus primarily on the embodied and institutionalized cultural capital as it plays out in the fields of higher education and higher education policy.

Cultural Capital & Policy Literacy

Given this study's emphasis on embodied cultural capital in relation to structure and field, I think it is useful to clarify one specific form and relationship. Policy literacy (Lo Bianco, 2001) serves as a form of embodied cultural capital. It grants students and instructors the skills and knowledge to effectively navigate the complexities and bureaucracies of offices and policies at the community college.

Policy literacy "requires that academics and teachers of literacy become more immersed in the operations of policy as national projects." It asks that agents "elevate literacy measures to prominence beyond education frameworks" (p. 226). I extend this to include the participation of students. This study argues for a general redistribution of embodied cultural capital as policy literacy--those tools, skills, and experiences necessary for best navigating experiences and advising students at the public two-year college. This sentiment may best be summarized by the Austrian economist, Fritz Machlup, who argued that "improvements of capacity, as a rule, result from the acquisition of 'knowing what' and 'knowing how'" (Machlup, 1984, p. 8)

Reading through Bourdieu

Bourdieu's Field Theory allows for the analysis of social forces and the implications on individual agents. The relationship between field, structure, and habitus provides a useful frame

for conceptualizing the relationships between community colleges and higher education policies, administrative offices and institutional practices, and the distribution or preservation of wealth and capital. This study examines how external structures and fields might be internalized and impact a student's chance at success.

This question of internalization is a recurrent theme in the work of Bourdieu, the center of which represents a fundamental refutation of the standard epistemological methods for reading social structures and systems (1997). In his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, and drawing on the fields of anthropology, sociology, and psychology, Bourdieu argues against both phenomenological subjectivism as well as objectivist research paradigms, instead calling for a *relational methodology* (Bourdieu, 1997). In such a methodology, Bourdieu argues for an emphasis on the primacy of relations.

The logical relationships constructed by the anthropologist are opposed to “practical” relationships – practical because continuously practiced, kept up, and cultivated – in the same way as the geometrical space of a map, an imaginary representation of all theoretically possible roads and routes, is opposed to the network of beaten tracks, of paths made ever more practicable by constant use. (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 38).

In recognizing that relational patterns might emerge from “constant use,” Bourdieu posits that such a methodology is neither phenomenological nor strictly objectivist, as it neither “sets out to make explicit the truth of primary experience of the social world,” nor does it “structure practice and representations of practice... in particular, primary knowledge, practical and tacit, of the familiar world” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 3).

Such a methodology might best be understood by recognizing that with it, Bourdieu sought to solve what he called the problem of agency and structure in social theories. This

problem is addressed most clearly by the sociologist David Swartz (1997) who relays that amongst Bourdieu's most critical questions concerning agency and structure were, "What motivates human action? Do individuals act in response to external causes as much mainstream academic sociology tends to assume? Is individual action determined by 'culture,' 'social structure,' or mode of production?" (Swartz, p.8). In short, Bourdieu questioned how individuals behave within systems – social and cultural systems, institutional systems, and political and economic systems – while arguing that the traditional methods of inquiry were no longer relevant.

For this study, Bourdieu's conceptualizations highlight that the collection of dispositions, impulses and assumptions that formulate a fixed set of beliefs about our-selves, our potential and our respective places in society problematizes so many students' passage through the education system. For Bourdieu, in addition to producing literal barriers, structural issues like income inequality and systemic racism also influence an individual's sense of self. Thus, instead of providing a bridge between social classes—a place to safely change lanes—higher education often reproduces social classes and only reminds students of "where they belong," that college isn't meant for them, that the chasm is wide and the fall deep.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

The Rockefeller Chapel towers two hundred feet above the streets of Chicago. It is an impressive building—designed to serve as the “central and dominant feature” of the University of Chicago’s Hyde Park campus. Modeled in the Collegiate Gothic architectural tradition, the University of Chicago recalls images of other prestigious institutions. Oxford, Cambridge, and Princeton, all come to mind. The Collegiate Gothic style imitates the Gothic Revival architecture of nineteenth century Europe, which with its “Pointed or Christian Architecture,” sought to produce a “purer society” (Pugin, 1841). It should come as no surprise that colleges and universities adopted such an ideologically charged design for their buildings and campuses. After all, the university was once thought to be akin to the monastery—a place for growth and contemplation, far from the distractions of city life, where only the best minds and the most capable students might study to find themselves becoming better men.

Forty miles south of the University of Chicago, on the edge of the Middle Rock Run County Forest Preserve, sits the Joliet Junior College, formerly the Joliet Township High School. Joliet Township High School is a cathedral in its own right, constructed in the Romanesque architectural style. In 1890, when the University of Chicago first opened its doors, just two years before the second Morrill Act granted federal appropriations to “land-grant colleges,” the Joliet Township High School would siphon off an unused wing and designate a handful of classrooms to the newly formed “Joliet Junior College,” calling it a sort of “advanced department of the high school,” this country’s first public community college (Witt et al., 1994, p. 22). Once the college grew to the point of needing its own campus, it quickly and notably left the Romanesque style behind, opting instead for a more clinical façade. Today, the Joliet Junior College looks more like a medical complex than the towers of the University of Chicago. It is difficult not to read

into such a transformation, especially given the etymological roots of “remediation,” remedy, *to heal*.

In the chapter that follows, I explore the political origins of the community college and address the complex and largely contradictory missions of these institutions. By drawing from the fields of policy analysis, financial aid, and pedagogy and tracing the major political events that have left a marked influence on higher education policy, I do my best to report where they influence student experience most. Finally, through both archival and my own research, I explore the impacts of community colleges, the practice of remediation, and the administration and policies of financial aid awards as a means to better identify where and how students experience policy implementation most acutely.

Methods

For the purpose of best assessing the current state of research on issues pertaining to the intersection of college success and remediation, financial aid, and community colleges, all data included in this review is archival. The Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University proved to be an invaluable asset, providing significant statistical data on attrition and persistence rates amongst community college students, as well as important information concerning both the practice of college remediation and the community college at large. While a sizable amount of data was acquired through the CCRC, other resources, such as *Basic Writing*, *Community College Review*, and *Research & Teaching in Developmental Education*, offered theoretical, pedagogical, and practical resources—all of which helped to articulate a comprehensive representation of the current state of these issues.

The material that follows does not claim to be exhaustive or comprehensive. Instead it is organized according to the following criteria, which I believe represent a holistic portrait of the community college's impact:

1. Rates of transfer within six years of enrolling at the community college
2. Rates of degree completion within six years of enrolling at the community college
3. Any array of other effects produced by attending the community college; this might include, but is not limited to, changes in social or economic status, professional or vocational placements, overall wellness, and self-confidence or self-perception

This impact is measured across three primary areas of research, which I believe intersect and overlap in ways that might present significant obstacles for underrepresented, first-generation, or inexperienced students:

1. Community colleges
2. College remediation (specifically remedial English)
3. Financial aid, admissions, and public policies

As discussed in Chapter 1, community colleges are often simultaneously and paradoxically celebrated for their democratizing influences and lamented for their diversionary influences. By organizing the research that follows according to the aforementioned criteria, this study examines these internal inconsistencies by specifically focusing on how community colleges *impact* underrepresented students' experiences at and after the community college.

Popular mediums such as the *New York Times* provided important contexts on immediate issues, such as New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's Excelsior Scholarship, as well as revealed significant cultural zeitgeists, such as student protests at the City University of New York during the Civil Rights Era. *The Chronicle of Higher Ed.* and *Inside Higher Ed.* offered discussion and

opinioned perspective on financial aid policy, higher education policy reform, and opinion pieces on higher education policy and its impact on institutions as well as individual students.

As a means to better understand said policy without assuming the perspective of a critic, legislation such as the 2015 College for All Act and the 2014 Supporting College Success Through Dual Enrollment Act, served as important primary sources, outlining the policy options from our current social and political context, while grant and scholarship materials were viewed and analyzed in their original context as a means to best preserve their original intent.

Finally, the decision was made to isolate and represent the Industrial Revolution and the Morrill Land Grant Acts and The Civil Rights Era and the Higher Education Act, as both periods and their respective changes to higher education policy have resonant implications in our modern context: the United States under the Trump administration and New York State under the governance of Andrew Cuomo. Governor Cuomo's Excelsior scholarship program in particular, originally conceptualized to meet some of the campaign promises of democratic presidential aspirants Senator Bernie Sanders and Secretary Hillary Clinton, is analyzed as a means to highlight the current trends in community college funding and its implications on remediation. These three periods were chosen for their role in forming significant changes to higher education policy and remediation in public colleges and universities.

The Political Origins of the Community College

The Joliet Junior College was established in the wake of the second Morrill Act, which allocated federal dollars to the public education system and is better known for producing "land-grant colleges" that were endowed and established to focus on the practical and vocational needs of the shifting industrial economy of the nineteenth century. Both the JJC and the Land Grant

Colleges served this purpose, but they also worked to provide greater access to higher education to a wider, previously ostracized, student body (Arendale, 2002).

The Morrill Acts generated greater access for students who otherwise might not have attended college. In the latter portion of the nineteenth century, tertiary education was still mostly limited to wealthy white men—children of the elite—generally from the Northeast. The Land-Grant Colleges opened their doors to a new American student, one who saw college level learning not just as a place for intellectual, spiritual, or personal growth but as a means for securing professional (or vocational) positions as well as economic stability.

This new demographic would often fail to meet the rigid educational standards of universities like Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, but many new college founders would aim to create their colleges in the images of these Ivy League institutions. With the help of philanthropist John D. Rockefeller, William Rainey-Harper imagined the University of Chicago—a private research university—as the “Harvard or Yale of the Midwest, with the most accomplished faculty that money could buy and a mission focused on scholarship and research,” (Scherer & Anson, 2014, p. 7). In Harper’s imagination, the University of Chicago would preserve the academic tradition of the elite schools of the Northeast and ultimately maintain the distribution of educational assets in the United States.

Unfortunately for Harper, many of the students who enrolled at the University of Chicago did not live up to those expectations of academic prestige (Scherer & Anson, 2014, p. 8), stoking his primary fear: that faculty and resources would be “wasted” on lower performing students and lowerclassmen. In order to meet the needs of the students, develop the reputation of his university, and participate in the shifting market-economy, William Rainey-Harper declared that all “general education should be relegated to a collection of junior-level colleges—*something akin to thirteenth*

and fourteenth years of high school, where all high school graduates could enroll in college-level courses in a broad array of general, but essential fields, of study” (Scherer & Anson, 2014, p.8). Such a move would redefine the notion of “college-readiness” for generations to come. On one hand, it would democratize higher education, creating an opportunity for enrollment that simply did not previously exist. On the other hand, it created a hard division between “collegiate and preparatory” (Reed, 1971, p. 43), etching a long and deep line between the two, one that would begin to widen fractures in the architecture of American higher education.

While Harper worried about the status of his university, Joliet Township High School Superintendent, J. Stanley Brown—a fierce advocate of higher education—wrestled with the fact that many of his high school graduates could not attend the blossoming prestigious University of Chicago. Harper and Brown talked. What resulted was a sort of deal, wherein Brown’s students might have the option to access higher education, and Harper could maintain the reputation of his University of Chicago. Together, Harper and Brown transformed a single hallway of the Joliet Township High School into a two-year college, renaming it The Joliet Junior College (Witt et al., 1994).

Over a century later, we are witnessing the compounding effects of Harper and Brown’s infamous deal. The birth of the community college represents the origins of our current and highly differentiated tertiary education system, wherein elite research universities are somehow corralled into the same category as community colleges, permitted to compete for the same public appropriations, but reflect quite differently on a student’s transcripts. While public policy initiatives strive to democratize educational opportunity, the fact remains that many financial aid and accreditation policies disproportionately affect underrepresented students at the community college, and since the modern trend is to relegate remediation to community colleges, those

students who are struggling the most. In spite of this, remedial students and the community college remain largely underrepresented in policy discussions.

It is clear that the impacts of the community college mix with those from remediation and public policy. What is unclear, however, is what happens when these aspects and issues collide—how students *experience* policy roll-out and implementation. In the material that follows, I trace a series of patterns throughout the current research on community colleges, college remediation, and relevant policy discussions. It is my hope that this material will provide the bedrock and foundation for a qualitative study and examination of the impact of each individual aspect as well as their intersection.

The Industrial Revolution and the Morrill Land Grant Acts

The Morrill Land Grant Acts and the Higher Education Act of 1965 represent two of the United States' most progressive and democratizing policy decisions pertinent to post-secondary education. Both were conceived during periods of significant social and political unrest and ultimately afforded historically underrepresented demographics an opportunity for college level learning. The section that follows is an exploration of these policies and their origins, as it is my belief that they provide a political foundation for our current crisis of college access.

Long before the City University of New York would come to embrace its open admissions policy, institutions of higher education were wrestling with issues of placement, remediation, and political legislation. Over a century earlier, the first Morrill Act guaranteed “financial support for what would become Historic Black Colleges and Universities, and [permitted the] growth of junior/community colleges” (Arendale, 2002, p. 12). While this legislation produced greater educational opportunity and accessibility, “the academic preparation level of the potential students was uneven” (Arendale, 2002, p. 12)—a problem which would resonate across college campuses

for the next 100 years. In an effort to accommodate and educate this new demographic, “remedial” classes were introduced to the college curriculum.

By the mid 1860s, American colleges were forced to adapt to the changing economic climate brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, American colleges were largely limited to prestigious universities like Yale, Harvard, Columbia, and Brown, most of which were funded by private investors (Scholes, 1998), but as social and economic climates shifted there was a new demand for skilled labor, thus President Abraham Lincoln signed the First Morrill Land Grant Act into law which provided the funding for the public university system we know today. Schools funded by the act provided courses and majors in agriculture, engineering, science, and military science all “without excluding ... classical studies” (Arendale, 2002).

These new programs, many of which became Agriculture and Mechanical or “A&M” schools, were designed to meet the needs of a growing industrial class, so the new student body differed greatly from the traditional students of the Ivy League universities. And while the educational system shifted to meet the needs of the new political economy, it also had to adapt to the needs of its new student demographics. One year after the implementation of these schools, 84% of newly funded colleges were providing some form of remediation (Arendale, 2002). It might be reasonable to state that remediation responds directly to the shifting needs of the political economy, as changes in the job market necessitate new forms of skilled labor.

The Civil Rights Era and the Higher Education Act of 1965

A century after the Morrill Acts provided programs and funding for non-traditional college enrollees to explore higher education, the Civil Rights era would deepen the United States of America’s commitment to greater educational access. Advocacy coalitions fueled by the rhetoric

and missions of figures like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X would come to demand equity in access to higher education, while university administrators and policy entrepreneurs would wrestle over how their decisions would affect both the university and society at large.

Throughout the 1960s, activists and advocates pressured policymakers to make higher education accessible in terms of financial aid and admissions practices. Many of these debates manifested in the policy maneuvers arching toward affirmative action (Karabel, 1999). Selective colleges and universities adopted affirmative action policies in what can be described as two distinct waves: an early wave responding primarily to the pressure of guilt and a later wave responding primarily to fear. Early adopters of affirmative action based their decisions on an intrinsic desire to make higher education more accessible to a wider body of students or some sense of guilt, that their left-leaning institution may have been working to oppress some marginalized population. They may not have made such a bold move without public pressure and policy entrepreneurs such as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, but their decisions were—nonetheless—anchored to some sense of moral justice (Karabel, 1999).

Later adopters were less interested in generating access and more interested in preserving the integrity and reputation of their universities. Riots and the threat of violence may have provided the shock necessary for these institutions to adopt affirmative action policies. Those such as Dartmouth and Princeton only adopted affirmative action after it became clear that the country was shifting towards greater racial equality. Administrators from these colleges were motivated by two primary realities: 1) the fact that they would be left on the wrong side of history if they did not progress 2) their campuses could be in danger of physical damage, as was the case with riots in Trenton and Los Angeles.

While affirmative action decisions had little direct impact on community colleges and less selective colleges and universities, the public discourse surrounding accessibility for underrepresented students warrants discussion and analysis. It might be argued that without a supreme court decision (and its respective media coverage) on affirmative action, we may have never seen the proliferation or politicization of open admissions policies and community colleges.

Lyndon B. Johnson's federal response. While individual states and individual colleges and universities struggled to develop programs and policies that might generate greater educational attainment, Lyndon B. Johnson began work on two of his most progressive reform bills, The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Higher Education Act of 1965 both emblematic of Johnson's vision of "The Great Society," which aimed primarily to dismantle both racial injustice and systemic poverty. This ideology may be represented most clearly in the Higher Education Act of 1965, which established our current financial aid and work study systems for higher education and promised greater access and equity through the development and implementation of BRIDGE programs like CUNY's SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge) as well as the federal Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) (The Higher Education Act of 1965).

The New York State policy response. While President Johnson wrestled with these issues at the federal level, individual states and cities saw constituents demanding change in more local contexts. While LBJ and federal legislators imagined the United States as "The Great Society," northern cities like Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York, populated after the Great Migration, became battlegrounds for the civil rights movement. New York City, in particular, played an important role when, on July 18th, 1964, a white police officer shot and killed fifteen year-old James Powell, an African-American boy from the Bronx. Following the shooting, and calling the incident an act of police brutality, eight-thousand residents of Harlem launched a riot, "setting fires

and looting local businesses. The eruption of violence soon spread to the nearby neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant and continued for six days, resulting in the death of one resident, over one hundred injuries, and more than 450 arrests” (“New York Race Riots”). Over the next three months, similar riots would emerge in Philadelphia, Rochester, Chicago, Jersey City, Paterson, and Elizabeth (“New York Race Riots”).

Johnson’s Civil Rights Act would be signed into law the following year, but many urban centers and public facilities would fail to see substantial changes for decades. Such was the case for the City University of New York. Five years after the Civil Rights Act was signed into law, and four years after the Higher Education Act was signed into law, “more than 200 Black and Puerto-Rican students padlocked the gates of the south campus at City College and took over 17 buildings to force the college to accept more minority students” (Arenson, 1999). Fueled by the national debate over affirmative action policies and worried by the seemingly increasing homogeneity of their college in an increasingly diversifying city, student activists identified CUNY’s policies and the reaction of New York City mayor, John Lindsay, as incongruous with the mission of the civil rights movement and the legislation of both the Civil Rights and the Higher Education Acts.

In response to the allegations that he was not doing enough to support his city on the eve of a complete fiscal collapse, Lindsay pushed for CUNY’s open enrollment policy, which “guaranteed to every city resident with a high-school diploma a place in one of its eighteen tuition-free colleges” thus welcoming “the true outsiders” and “strangers in academia” to the college classroom (Shaughnessy, 1977, p. 387-388).

CUNY’s open admissions policies, while courageous and idealistic, ultimately failed to provide quality education to large portions of incoming students. They did, however, provide a

progressive platform from which John Lindsay would eventually launch an ultimately unsuccessful presidential campaign (Rothenstein, 2010). While the program was tirelessly designed at the political, economic, and legislative levels, little was done to prepare the teaching faculty and administration for such a shift. It could legitimately be argued that its intent was always more about policy than pedagogy, more about politics than students.

At the time of the policy implementation, there was no scholarly forum for discussing issues in remediation, no pedagogy for teaching remedial English, no textbooks for instructor use, and rampant social insensitivities on the part of the teaching faculty. Despite such seemingly inclusive policies, many students dropped out or failed out of CUNY before earning degrees or certificates.

Open admissions initiatives such as CUNY's, while clearly politically pointed, rarely serve student interests. One might argue that while these initiatives boast progressive ideals, they fail to provide adequate resources at the ground level. Scherer and Anson (2014) argue that programs such as Lindsay's rarely provide access beyond the building of the school, meaning that they permit students physical access to the structure but do not provide scaffolding, resources, programming, or procedures to support these students. Burton Clark (1960) calls this the "cooling-out" effect, wherein students are admitted and accepted to higher education but ultimately thinned out by inadequate program design. This results in the same effect as if students were never admitted in the first place.

Trump, Cuomo, and the Excelsior Scholarship

CUNY's 1970 open admissions experiment was an ambitious endeavor. Though, without any effective infrastructure, faculty efforts waned, students dropped out, and the program ultimately collapsed. CUNY abandoned open admissions and started charging tuition in 1976,

citing New York City's fiscal crisis as the primary reason (Jaschik, 2017). While conventional wisdom claims that we learn from our mistakes, Cuomo's plan and the public excitement about it appears to prove otherwise. Things have admittedly changed since the 1970s. Remedial students have advocates. Developmental studies have their own journals, conferences, pedagogies, and support structures (Shaughnessy, 1976). At SUNY and CUNY schools alone, there are a variety of programs aimed at streamlining remediation. Programs like ASAP (Accelerated Study in Associate Programs), ALP (Accelerated Learning Program), SWW (Supplemental Writing Workshops), and CUNY Start, which all work to expedite the process of remediation for first year students at public colleges and universities. With all of that said, remediation still proves to be a significant barrier for many students, especially when it comes to higher education policy options.

The Excelsior Program, which subsidizes tuition for any student whose family earns less than \$125,000.00 per year, requires that students maintain a full-time course-load of 15 credits per semester. Such a course-load may be difficult if not impossible for many students who are required to work throughout their degree, and such is the case for many students who fall on the lower end of Cuomo's financial coverage spectrum. Similarly, "The program does not cover the other costs of college, which include but are not limited to fees, room and board, transportation, textbooks, meal plans, and more" ("Excelsior Scholarship").

Cuomo's plan comes with one more significant caveat: upon graduation, students who receive funds from the excelsior scholarship, must live in New York State for the same amount of years as they received funding support. "Sara Goldrick-Rab, posted a series of highly critical tweets on the provision [requiring students participating in the excelsior program to commit to

staying in the state of New York for as many years as they received aid], calling it ‘extortion,’ ‘bad public policy’ and a ‘trick’” (Jaschik, 2017).

Cuomo’s bill is obviously influenced by the external shock of the Trump presidency. It aims to exploit the public’s need for an alternative to the neoliberal policies of Betsy DeVos and Donald Trump. Put simply, “The action in New York represents a revival of the free tuition concept--which featured prominently in the presidential campaigns of Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton last year and then was widely seen as dead after Donald Trump defeated Clinton in November,” (Jaschik, 2017), but such policies need to do more than simply arrive in the nick of time. Cuomo’s policy seems to fall into the same trap as Mayor Lindsay’s. Lindsay, who never carried any of the outer boroughs in either of his mayoral campaigns, ultimately failed to earn the trust of the middle and working classes of New York, despite his efforts to publicly subsidize their higher education.

Examples such as these represent an important baseline for future higher education policies. They also ask an important question: What are colleges for? More specifically, they beg the question of *who are community colleges for?* On the surface, both the Morrill Acts and the Higher Education Act represent progressive achievements in higher education policy, but both have also led to a certain type of institutional segregation. In the sections that follow, and by reviewing material relevant to the field, this segregation is called into question. As the community college become more isolated, it could become considered a form of institutional apartheid (Shor, 1990) or even engineered to preserve the culture and privilege of students who attend upper division schools, the students with more financial assets (Dougherty, 1994).

Parallel Lanes: Community Colleges, Financial Aid, and Remediation

The American community college is built on bureaucracy. Today more than ever, students experience the influence and impacts of a variety of policy decisions at the federal, state, and even institutional and departmental levels. The complexity of these impacts is rooted in its interdisciplinarity, in instances when the commensuration of credit points at the registrar is different than the commensuration of credit hours at the office of financial aid, for example. These issues are complicated further when underrepresented students have to navigate these waters alone. Since community colleges are almost always part of a larger public system, that navigation can be tricky at best and paralyzing at worst. In the following sections, through both a review of literature and my own study, I explore how the institution of community college (Dougherty, 1994), the implementation of financial aid policies (Doyle, 2008), and the implementation of remediation (Shor, 1996) converge around underrepresented students, many of whom are the first in their families to attend post-secondary education.

The Impact and Effects of Community Colleges

Since the birth of the Joliet Junior College, researchers, administrators, instructors, and students have all debated the democratizing capabilities of community colleges. For some, the community college represents the best, and possibly only, option for underrepresented populations to participate in higher education. It is, in many ways, the manifestation of the American Dream, whereby those who want it badly enough, work hard and sacrifice enough, can further their education and establish themselves as vital and contributing parts of the American economy. But for others, community colleges are little more than a tangled web of bureaucracy and frustration. Loopholes in financial aid policy paired with credits that do not transfer and the seemingly endless list of remedial courses leave many feeling that community college may be more frustration than it is worth.

Do community colleges, and by extension, remediation create an opportunity or produce an obstacle for underrepresented and underprepared baccalaureate aspirants? Since the 1860s public policy and political legislation has had a marked, albeit sometimes invisible, influence on public higher education, community colleges, and remediation. As of 2015, 6.3 million students were enrolled in public, two-year colleges, and at any given time, about a quarter of all college students are enrolled in community colleges, and 68% of those students are required to enroll in some form of remediation (Chen & Simone, 2016).

In the sections that follow, the belief of equity and access at community colleges is called into question. By analyzing the impact of college remediation, financial aid policies, and the architecture of American tertiary education, I explore when and how underrepresented students experience policy implementation at the American community college.

The democratizing and diversionary effects of community colleges. It should go without saying that colleges and universities serve more interests than just those of their students. They are, in many ways, both political and industrial complexes, but deeper reading reveals the nuances and effects of community colleges and, by extension, remediation programs. Kevin Dougherty (1994) argues against the binary logic associated with arguments over community colleges:

Like many scholars and laypeople, the advocates and critics of the community college believe in moral symmetry. If an institution is good or bad in its effects, then it must be similarly good or bad in its origins. In the case of the advocates, since they view the community college as democratizing in its impact, they move easily to arguing that it is democratic in its origins. The critics, meanwhile, moved by the inegalitarian consequences

of the community college, portray it as the product of a much seamier conception.
(Dougherty, 1994, p. 22)

Dougherty recognizes that thinking about community colleges, their effects, and their origins in such essential terms might mask some of their more nuanced capacities and capabilities, as well as obscure their political or legislative origins.

Dougherty argued that functionalist advocates or “the defenders of the community college paint it as a broad-based coalition of forces with students and parents at the center... [citing] local educators, state school superintendents and state higher education boards, and officials... [whose] dominant motive was a desire to expand equality of opportunity” (Dougherty, 1994, p. 23). Under this view, community colleges serve the student center and work to generate a more democratic society by providing access and opportunity to anyone who enrolls.

What makes college “Worth it?” Underpinning the arguments over whether or not college is accessible enough is another argument over its intrinsic value, an argument over whether or not college is “worth it.” Postsecondary education has long stood as a source of embodied cultural or symbolic capital, or as a way to break social and economic class. But in recent decades the value of higher education, especially amongst members of the Republican Party, has been called into question. According to research conducted at the Pew Center, 58% of Republicans and Republican leaning independents view higher education as *detrimental* (Fingerhut, 2017). The financial costs of Higher Education are generally cited as its most damaging effect, because higher education is typically associated with economic *opportunity* rather than financial *burden*. This raises an important question: is the worth of college measured in a student’s earning potential? Similarly, community colleges are positively related to other non-monetary outcomes such as gains

in health, less reliance on welfare, and a reduction in criminal activity (Belfield & Bailey, 2011). All of which paint a different picture of the influence of the community college and its impact.

Research conducted at the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University indicates that students who attend community colleges yield lower earnings than those pursuing or graduating from baccalaureate programs, but they do earn more—on average—than their contemporaries with no post-secondary educational experience at all (Belfield & Bailey, 2011, p. 49). So, it is clear that community colleges do provide some democratizing effect, an assertion further substantiated by the fact that students do not necessarily need to graduate with an associate's degree to receive the added earnings from attending community college.

By demographic breakdown, males who attend community college but do not receive a credential still receive a 9% earnings gain, while females who attend but do not receive a credential receive a 10% earnings gain (Bailey & Belfield, 2011, p.49-51). Females benefit with a 22% earnings gain increase upon graduating with an associate's degree, while males receive a 13% increase (Belfield & Bailey, 2011, p. 49). As of 2015, data on earnings by race is inconsistent, as some studies support that by advancing to baccalaureate programs Blacks¹ yield larger earning gains than Whites, while others report that Blacks earn the least gains from attending tertiary education programs overall (Belfield & Bailey, 2011, p. 53). The functionalist notion promulgates the belief that community colleges serve an important function, to track the lowest earning members of society into vocational and low-earning professional positions, which helps to secure and maintain both social hierarchies and the economy.

¹ Racial and ethnic groups are recognized as proper nouns and are thus capitalized.

Marxist Instrumentalists, however, believe that “community colleges were championed as a means to enhance university selectivity... and because the capitalist class believe that these kinds of colleges would better meet its interest in securing occupational education and protecting selective university admissions” (Dougherty, 1994, p. 24), ultimately echoing the work of Bourdieu by arguing that such institutions reproduce social inequalities. The Marxist Instrumentalists argue that community colleges represent a form of social control, which prohibits members of the working class or other underrepresented groups from enrolling in elite and prestigious universities, such as is seen in the political origins of the University of Chicago and Joliet Junior College.

For them, the “access” of community colleges is only access to training for proletariat labor, a point supported by the fact that vocational majors and programs provide higher earning potential than academic degrees. Studies support that students taking courses in business, health, and vocational and technical programs earn the highest gains (Belfield & Bailey, 2011, p.54). Such data may reveal a sort of “cooling-out” wherein student from lower-socioeconomic demographics elect to drop out of baccalaureate tracks and pursue vocational or technical programs (Clark, 1960).

Community colleges and departmental policies. Since the overwhelming majority of community college English faculty are adjuncts—many of whom have graduate degrees in literature, little teaching experience, less composition experience, and little-to-no experience with remedial student bodies—it is common that remedial students are subject to some of the weakest pedagogical performances on a college campus. This is no argument against adjuncts in general, but the fact remains that many adjuncts are overworked, underpaid, and string together a living by travelling from campus to campus, teaching 4 or 5 days a week.

The result here is less of a presence on campus. Adjuncts tend to have fewer office hours,

have less contact with other faculty members, and are less a part of the academic culture on campus. Similarly, many colleges staff their courses based on a seniority system. This means that full time faculty members with the most seniority get the first pick of courses, and rarely do they choose remedial reading or writing courses. When the last of the courses are left, adjuncts are ranked on seniority. Invariably, the instructors with the least experience make up the lion's share of instructors for remedial courses.

Given the fact that most remedial writing courses are graded on an SWUR basis, grades cannot incentivize performance. And given that the en-vogue assessment model for first year writing is the portfolio review process, instructors are encouraged to push their students to produce multiple drafts and multiple revisions. All of this equates to more work for participating faculty. Existentially speaking, these courses can be draining. Participation is low, and attrition rates are high. At best, students are encouraged and leave hopeful and optimistic about their careers as academics. 28% of those students will graduate (Bailey, 2009).

Community colleges and open admissions. Remedial enrollment at community colleges is high, because most community colleges adopt an open admissions policy, meaning that any student with a high school diploma (or its equivalent) is guaranteed a seat in the community college system. This may be where the problem of obstacle or opportunity is the most obvious. Open admissions means everybody gets a chance, but it is not unreasonable to argue that without appropriate infrastructure, open admissions policies grant little more than *access to the buildings*.

If community colleges are going to remain sites of “open admissions” and Educational Opportunity Programs are to remain “equal opportunity,” we must reconsider or at least redefine what “access” means in this current economic climate. Admitting students without financial assistance or quality instruction sets students up to “fail to achieve any degree or success in their

coursework and [leave] college either with wasted Pell grants and/or significant personal debt, precious time expended, and nothing to show for their experience but a transcript communicating failure to the outside world (Scherer & Anson, 2014).

As mentioned earlier remedial students lack both points articulated by Scherer & Anson: quality instruction and financial assistance. These problems seem to fuel each other: Open admissions policies grant an “opportunity,” because many students admitted on open admissions policies wouldn’t be accepted at more selective colleges and thus place into remedial coursework. Financial Aid opportunities, however, are limited for remedial students, so we find that the students with the most financial aid opportunities are the same students who might have been accepted at more selective colleges, as is evidenced by the fact that they did not place into remedial coursework. This issue is further complicated by the fact that low-income and minority students are disproportionately represented in remedial demographics. So, what you end up with is the students who perform worst are also the most economically disadvantaged. They need the most financial assistance, but their status as remedial limits their aid options. This is the paradox of remediation: opportunity or obstacle?

The Impact and Effects of Financial Aid Policies

The Higher Education Act of 1965 is responsible for developing the financial aid system we know today. Title IV of Johnson’s legislation implemented the Pell Grant Program, Federal Early Outreach, and Student Services Programs, Academic Achievement Incentive Scholarships, the Direct Loan Program, and countless other forms of financial assistance, many for the first time (The Higher Education Act of 1965). By exploring the nuances of both state and federal aid systems, I aim to identify how and when community college students from underrepresented

backgrounds, many of whom are enrolled in remedial coursework, might be misinformed or negatively impacted by confusing and obtuse financial aid policies.

An overview of college cost. Between 1981 and 2012, college tuition grew 181% at 4-year private colleges, 268% at 4-year public colleges, and 177% at community colleges (Heller, 2013, p. 104), making out of pocket financing of college education impossible for most American families. While college cost is clearly increasing, public subsidies have failed to keep pace with these increasing costs (Scott-Clayton, 2011, p. 1). Since the United States Constitution does not explicitly mention education, responsibility for providing funding to higher education institutions falls primarily on individual states (Stampen & Zulick, 2008, p. 1), but state and local operating subsidies have not kept pace with rising tuition or enrollments—tuition has risen well over 100 percent, and enrollment has risen from 33 percent in the 1960s to 61 percent in 2009 (Scott-Clayton, 2011, p. 1).

In some instances, individual states have even cut public subsidies to higher education institutions, as individual states are more receptive to economic shifts. For example, following the 2001 fiscal crisis, Illinois made a 10% cut to state appropriations (Doyle, p. 164). At the same time tuition has sky-rocketed, because of competition amongst institutions to attract star faculty, provide better (or more attractive) student amenities, and fund more technology on campus (Heller, 2013, p. 104).

Federal aid programs. Today, the federal loan program represents the largest portion of all student aid dollars, with the Stafford Loan being the largest of all federal loans. Undergraduate students may request up to a total of \$31,000, but those identified as in further need may borrow an additional \$23,000 in subsidized loans (Dynarski & Clayton-Scott, 2013, p. 73). In the 2010-11 academic year, \$147 billion of the total \$190 billion aid dollars came from the federal

government (Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013, p. 68), while state student financial aid programs only accounted for about eight percent of all undergraduate student aid (Doyle, 2008, p. 159).

The Higher Education Act aimed to “strengthen the educational resources of our colleges and universities and to provide financial assistance for students in postsecondary and higher education” (Davenport, 1982). It ultimately argued that greater federal oversight and intervention could provide necessary and over-due services and programs which might help underrepresented students. Arguably the most significant aspect of Title IV is the Federal Pell Grant Program, a non-categorical gift-aid program, which awarded an annual sum based on a student’s individual financial needs.

Simply put, students from lower socioeconomic classes are more responsive to student aid. They are, as Doyle puts it, on the “margin of attendance,” thus any decrease in net costs will increase their likelihood of enrollment—much more so than middle and upper class students (Doyle, 2008, p. 166). Programs like this—need-based aid programs—have the most significant impact on enrolling students from underrepresented populations, as aid targeted toward students with the greatest financial needs is more likely to enroll more students than if it were targeted toward other, more well-to-do, populations (Doyle, 2008, p. 166).

Need-based grants are awarded based on identified financial needs. The most common form of need-based award is the Pell Grant, which rose to about 14 billion in aid award dollars in 2006 and made up roughly one third of all gifted aid (Stampen & Zulick, 2008, p. 8). As of 2010-11, the average Pell award is \$3828, and 9.1 million awards were granted that year (Dynarski & Clayton-Scott, 2013, p. 73). Pell Grants are still the most widely available federal grants, making up the majority of federal aid grant dollars, accounting for \$34.8 billion of the total 47.8 billion federal grant dollars awarded in the 2010-11 academic year (Dynarski & Scott-

Clayton, 2013, p.71).

Need-based grants may also take the form of tax credits, work study, or LEAP grants (Stampen & Zulick, 2008, p. 9). The American Opportunity Tax Credit grants families of students enrolled in college a maximum annual \$2,500.00 tax credit and \$1000 refundable; school books and supplies are eligible expenses. The AOTC accounted for \$19 billion in 2010, though many students from lower-socioeconomic demographics never pursue filing for these tax credits (Dynarski & Clayton-Scott, 2013, p. 74).

Perhaps the HEA's most palpable impact was on financial aid—the primary impediment for so many baccalaureate aspirants. Higher education in the United States is financed primarily through cost-sharing, wherein students and or families are responsible to fund part—sometimes most—of the student's education by paying tuition (Hansen, 2008, p. 191). In the wake of neoliberal globalization, this model has spread to countries like Australia, New Zealand, and England, all of which have since shed state responsibility and adopted higher tuition fees. This stands in contrast to Finland and other Nordic countries where higher education is almost fully supported by tax-dollars, and there is no cost for tuition (Hansen, 2008, p. 191). In an effort to attract students, many colleges and universities are relying on a number of strategies to bolster the reputation and appeal of their institution. These strategies, of course, come at a financial cost, most of which is offset by raising tuition prices or is met through administering more remediation.

The cost of multiple enrollments. Pell Grants are administered per semester, for an average of \$3828.00. That is \$7625.00 per year, for a total of six years. To see how this works out, consider the case of a hypothetical “average” student. This student enrolls in his or her first semester at community college and places into a developmental course. This would probably be the case,

given that 68% of incoming freshman enroll in at least one developmental course per semester (Bailey, 2009), and if this student is of a minority demographic or from a lower class, he or she is even *more* likely to place into *more* remedial courses. Only 68% of any of those students pass their remedial writing courses; only 71% pass all of their developmental reading courses, and only 30% pass all of their developmental mathematics courses (Bailey, 2009) so our student may be enrolling in 2, 3, 4, sometimes 5 or 6 remedial classes over the course of one academic year. That can equate to thousands of dollars in financial aid award (or cash or loans), dozens of credit hours, and zero credit points.

The average cost for one 3-credit hour community college course in New York is \$567.00, so if this student places into developmental math and developmental writing (the most common combination), that amounts to roughly one third of their Pell Grant money, none of which counts toward degree completion. An overwhelming majority of students will not pass both classes on their first try. Only 28% of students who enroll in at least one developmental course complete a college credential or degree within eight and a half years. Pell Grants are exhausted after six (Bailey, 2009).

The Impact and Effects of Remediation

Current trends in research concerning remediation are bleak at best. Tom Bailey of the Community College Research Center put it best, when he argued “there is no consensus on how best to carry out developmental education...” but “...nearly 60 percent of students take at least one developmental education course during their community college career” (Bailey, 2009, p. 1). Like community colleges and financial aid policies, the influence of college remediation has a mystifying influence. In the section that follows, I explore how remediation might provide a

substantial obstacle for underrepresented community college students, while not explicitly prohibiting them from attending the college.

Cooling-out community college students. “Cooling-out,” according to Burton Clark (1986), refers to the practice of tracking underprepared students into the community college where they are accepted, but not necessarily supported. Underpinning the concept of cooling-out is the belief that open admissions programs and educational opportunity programs grant little more than access to buildings. By riddling higher education with internal barriers such as unpaid-internships, long commutes, expensive textbooks, and overwhelming workloads, working and lower-class students—as well as other non-traditional students—are weeded out. Mary Soliday (2002) describes this best when she argues that “internal barriers [work] to ‘cool out’ working-class students within an institution, or institutions [in order] to create less selective colleges that siphon off students who may not fulfill traditional educational narratives” (Soliday, p. 13). Thus, community colleges—those sites typically recognized as spaces of academic egalitarianism and opportunity—function largely to maintain the current structure of hegemonic difference.

The economics of remediation affect students in two very different but intimately related ways: 1) when institutions cut spending, the quality of instruction invariably declines. Community colleges are notorious for the variety of their instructors’ credentials, experiences, interests, and expertise; 2) when financial assistance programs adopt stricter eligibility requirements, students carry the weight of a failing educational model.

The Federal Student Aid program, (FSA) has long stood as a platform for leveling the economic playing field. The FSA provides students with financial assistance by way of grants, scholarships, and student loans, but the function of “cooling-out” becomes apparent once we begin to interrogate the program and its eligibility requirements:

(a) students cannot use FSA if they are only taking developmental coursework;... (b) students needing more than 1 year of developmental coursework may not use FSA dollars;... (c) courses below the high school level should not be FSA eligible; and... (d) students without or with dubious high school diplomas should not be allowed to use FSA funding. (as cited in Scherer & Anson, 2014)

The same is true in the case of the New York State's Tuition Assistance (TAP) Program, an annually distributed needs-based grant available only for SUNY and CUNY students for a maximum award of \$5165.00 ("New York State Tuition Assistance Program") From this, we may construct an argument about access, equality, and equity. If community colleges are going to remain sites of "open admissions" and Educational Opportunity Programs are to remain "equal opportunity," we must reconsider or at least redefine what "access" means in this current economic climate. Admitting students without financial assistance or quality instruction sets students up to "fail to achieve any degree or success in their coursework and [leave] college either with wasted Pell grants and/or significant personal debt, precious time expended, and nothing to show for their experience but a transcript communicating failure to the outside world (Scherer & Anson, 2014). If programs and policies only work so far as to grant students access to the campus, how are we to expect them to succeed?

The populations served at community colleges are no different than those Shaughnessy (1977) identified as "academic winners and losers from the best and worst high schools in the country, the children of the lettered and the illiterate, the blue-collared, the white-collared, and the unemployed" (Shaughnessy, p. 2).

More often than not remedial coursework counts toward credit hours but not credit points. This varies from institution to institution, but in many cases students can exhaust their

financial aid awards long before even coming close to graduation. This is true in the case of most needs-based awards: grants awarded based on identified financial needs. Since most other forms of financial aid do not cover remedial course work at all, students who cannot afford to pay for college in cash are left exhausting their aid awards such as Pell Grants on remedial coursework.

This issue is compounded once we consider two significant facts. 1) Students from modest economic backgrounds or minority groups are disproportionately represented in remedial classes. 2) Students enrolled in one developmental course are likely to be enrolled in multiple developmental courses and take the same courses multiple times (Bailey, 2009). This is particularly significant for students enrolled in developmental *English* classes. As students enrolled in developmental reading are more likely to place into the developmental writing *and* developmental mathematics, while students who place into developmental writing are likely to place also into developmental mathematics: a probable total of 9 credits.

Low SES and minority students. According to research conducted at the Community College Research Center, 78% of Black students, 75% of Hispanic students, and 64% of White students enroll in remedial coursework. 76% of the lowest socio-economic group enroll in remedial courses, while 59% of students from the highest income group enroll in remedial coursework. Thus, minority students and students from low socio-economic status are more likely to enroll in remedial courses at the public two-year community college, which is complicated by the fact that Pell Grants can be exhausted on remedial coursework. (Chen & Simone, 2016).

There are, of course, multiple ways to read this data. One may say that developmental coursework gives these students a chance, and for the few that do complete their coursework and graduate, that very well may be the case. The fact remains, however, that these students are not

essentially cognitively deficient, but rather products of the material world in which underrepresented groups, as Bourdieu reminds us, struggle with less economic and social resources, attend low-performing public school districts, and may come from families where they are of the first generation to attending college.

Visualizing the Field

Since their inception, publicly funded community colleges have been viewed as a place to remedy struggling students, to prepare them for the rigor of “authentic” college level learning at senior colleges and universities. This led to their intimate association with remediation. Between 1862 (the time at which the Morrill Act was signed) and 1889 some 84 percent of the newly funded colleges “provided some form of remedial education” (Arendale, 2002, p. 12) for incoming students. This trend would continue over the next century, while colleges and universities would struggle to adapt their curricula to the ever-changing student body who annually walked through their doors. Though, interestingly, the general consensus of such curricula was that these programs were actually *valued* and *recognized*; remedial education had not yet collected its pejorative stigma.

In the early 1900s “remedial education was an important and valued core element of [Historically Black Colleges and Universities]..., as they became the primary producers of educated minority college graduates” (Arendale, 2002, p.12). Such social and cultural expansion paved the way for college admissions of greater liberality, and the prototype for remediation—the academic preparatory department—was at the helm of this progress. Arendale (2002) reports that “The importance and degree of institutionalization of academic preparatory programs was documented by a study that found that by 1895, nearly 40 percent of all college students were directly admitted from the college’s own college preparatory department” (p.12), thus indicating

that while remediation programs undoubtedly assisted incoming students to succeed in higher education, they also helped generate income for the colleges, so they might “economically survive through payment of tuition and fees by these formerly academically underprepared students” (Arendale, 2002, p. 12).

This point realizes the intrinsic marriage between higher education, college remediation, and market trends. It is a sort of symbiosis wherein students in need of higher education, or at least what they perceive higher education has to offer, enroll in droves as a means to secure gainful professional employment. Such inflation results in the marketization of higher education, what Slaughter and Rhoades (2009) call “academic capitalism.”

The fact that many of these students fail to secure gainful employment or see any class mobility speaks to Bourdieu’s notion of higher education being an arena to reproduce inequality rather than alleviate it. Students are driven to enroll based on an economic need, but few see any rewards, though many see mountains of loan debt and opportunity lost—time that students could have spent working and earning, rather than accruing student loan debt.

In the next chapter, I outline the research design for my project, which explores these same issues from a Bourdieuan stance. By assuming the role of the researcher but carrying with me my own experiences with and in the community college, I interview five participants who either are enrolled in, were enrolled in, or teach at community colleges. My aim is to better understand their experiences, their perceptions, and their feelings about policy implementation when remediation, funding, and the community college all converge.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology and Methods

When I think about the automotive racing my father loved, I am struck by how judging the field often means seeing more than one thing at a time, anticipating things before they happen, and following the rules but only insofar as not to distort an acute sense of situational awareness; it is often contradictory, unreliable, and always subject to context and a variety of variables—the weather, the time, the drivers, even the course.

Now, I am even more awe-struck by how my father was able to capture those cars on film, how he, too, was able to judge the field, isolate a driver and follow him around the course, waiting for the right moment with the right light. Those frozen bits of time never told the whole story, but they captured enough of it to give a sense of the speed and the energy. When you look across those photographs, you can piece the race together. Each individual photograph tells the story of one driver, one expression, or one turn, but together they become a race.

Such a metaphor is apt comparison for a study like this. It asserts that meaning is made between the relationships between participants, context, and data. While those photographs themselves might be analyzed for implicit meaning, they mean more when they are recognized as a part of a larger panorama. After all, it is really the space between the first and second place cars that makes for a good race. At the same time, analysis of motorsports nearly always focuses on quantitative metrics—the speed of the cars, the age of the drivers, or the length of the course. My father's photographs, however, captured the *feeling* of the race.

It is easy to dismiss this kind of record or report as flimsy, subjective, or irrelevant. Such claims have been lobbed at qualitative researchers for decades. In the field of education, qualitative research methods have been called “common sense... subjective... biased... [and] only explorative” (Kvale, 1994). These arguments are understandable and perhaps even to be

expected, because after all, “doing qualitative research involves a healthy skepticism about whether ‘to see is to know’” (Luttrell, 2010, p.2). With respect to policy analysis and higher education, it is easy to “see” the statistical improvements the same way it is easy to watch a race. You are hypnotized by the flow of the cars around the track, and it is easy to miss the details, but it is even easier to miss the relationships between those details.

“Seeing as knowing” is the sort of epistemological bias at the heart of many contemporary policy debates. These situations and circumstances wherein “the numbers lie,” often amount to students suffering. Take for example, Peter Adams’ (2009) analysis of basic writing courses at the Essex Community College. At ECC, 57% of students were passing developmental writing, while an overwhelming 81% of all students enrolled in freshman composition were passing 101—pretty good. This would appear to indicate that most of the students who passed developmental writing also passed freshman composition, but upon closer analysis, Adams recognized another story in the data. 81% of freshman writers were passing because 66% of the students originally placed into developmental writing never even enrolled in 101. In Adams’ words:

The problem was not that basic writers were attempting first-year composition and failing; the problem was that they were giving up before they ever reached that course, a fact hidden when [we] had simply looked at the pass rates for the small number of students who did make it into regular composition. (Adams, Gearhart, Miller, et al., 2009, p. 52)

Administration at ECC missed the fact that the overwhelming majority of their basic writers were dropping out of college solely because they were focused on the impressive completion rates in 101. Those numbers missed the story, but perhaps what is most important is the

relationship between those stories, those numbers, and the policies and programs that generated both.

Far too often policy decisions are evaluated in impact studies and outcomes measures, most of which are cataloged and represented via quantitative means (Smith & Larimer, 2017) that may not tell the whole story or be positioned in such a way as to provide only a superficial vision. In order to better represent students' experiences with state, federal, institutional, and departmental policies, I adopted qualitative measures rooted in Pierre Bourdieu's relational sociology—specifically in the relationship between field, habitus, and capital. This, I believe, does not ignore the quantitative world surrounding these students, but rather recognize it as an important context, the traffic at the intersection of policy and remediation at community colleges.

In the rest of this chapter, I confront the epistemological chasm between qualitative and quantitative research methods and consider how neither can truly represent a wholly accurate representation of participants or data. Based on this, I present a research design that I believe can help present a different part of the policy conversation. This design puts student experience in dialogue with higher education policies by asking the following question: How do students and instructors in developmental English courses at community colleges experience the implementation of higher education policies?

Methodology

The sociology of Pierre Bourdieu prioritizes the relationships between objects, agents, context, and power in social settings. He states this most clearly when he argues that “le réel est relationnel” (“the real is relational”) (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 17). This idea posits that meaning is generated through interaction, that phenomena, behavior, or reality cannot be accurately—or perhaps meaningfully—analyzed in isolation. For the relational sociologist, society is not a space within which relations occur. Instead, society is the relationships themselves (Donati, 2011).

With reference to research, relational sociology presents a methodology that privileges the study of context, situatedness, and experience in addition to a craft-focus on data, cases, and participants.

Relational sociology prioritizes the study of experience, but it differs from phenomenology in the sense that, as a research paradigm, a phenomenological approach to educational research posits individuals' experiences at the center of a study, while relational sociology considers experience to be a *part* of the study, similarly the interactions between structures, agents, and fields is also referenced as part of the "experience." The structures that design and orchestrate those experiences are equally important in relational sociology. It is important to recognize governing contexts. Phenomenology seeks to enter the "world of the subject" (Geertz, 1973), drawing attention to those perceptual experiences with what Husserl called an "intentionality" (2001), to—in the words of Martin Heidegger— "let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (2008, p. 58). Phenomenological research seeks to understand the subject's experiences of a given phenomenon, not to ascertain trends.

Trends are important in relational sociology, as they come to represent how social schema are reproduced, how individuals are habituated into behaving in certain structured ways. Bourdieu describes this in Field Theory, which argues that agents in the field are coaxed into behaviors, practices, and norms that reproduce social structures and hegemonic relationships, like class and gender-inequalities. In the context of this study, the relationships between socio-economic status, college experience, income, and higher-education policy warrant close analysis.

Relational sociology allows for flow and exchange between quantitative and qualitative research. As I presented in chapter two, much of this study is indebted to the quantitative

research of policy analysts and economists, or research in financial aid, college admissions, and rates of retention and attrition. This work is important, but this study argues that it is not enough. Nor would be an ethnographic study into the subjectivities and phenomenological experiences of community college students and drop-outs be enough. There is a dire need for dialogue between the student experience and the policy arena. Relational sociology provides an opportunity to structure methods and analysis to do just that.

The distribution, nature, and impact of power is at the center of Bourdieu's relational sociology, just as it is in this study. Adapting Max Weber's study of power and domination, the focus of relational sociology is in how "social life rests on such power relations, [wherein] not every social actor has enough amount of power to change the power set he is in or to achieve recognition by society, in terms of both identity and difference" (Papilloud & Schultze, 2018, p. 343). The study of power then, might best be understood as *an analysis of how impact is experienced*. In order to analyze the experience of impact with respect to community colleges and developmental English, I pay close attention to my participant's individual experiences, the relevant current research on higher education policy, and perhaps most importantly, to the relationships between these two aspects.

Against the "Language of Policy:" A Crisis in Representation

It is a fact that the dialogue surrounding higher education and public policies is largely one informed by quantitative research (Smith & Larimer, 2017). The reasons for this are clear and obvious. Quantitative research reflects general trends and considers how policy implementation impacts large demographics. This study does not intend to argue against the significance or necessity of such research, but it does make the argument that qualitative

methods and methodologies, particularly relational methods and methodologies, can provide a more dynamic portrait.

This study is rooted in the belief that the quantitative language of policy is really a *discourse* of education policy, and such a crisis in representation may best be understood as a series of complex and interrelated questions concerning when, why, and how best to incorporate or call upon the voices and experiences of research participants. In its essence, the crisis of representation is equally a crisis in mediation—a question further complicated when researchers are called to speak for others. As I have come to understand it, this crisis is compounded by the political nature of education research, but it is potentially balanced by invitational approaches to rhetorical mediation—those forms that avoid argumentation and rather invite conversation instead.

Agendas and biases are both implicit and necessary in qualitative research like this, as such work is predicated on a moral sense of justice and exists to make political, social, material, or ideological changes in the palpable world. In the policy arena or the field of higher education policy, researchers often begin their studies with what is deliberately called the “agenda setting” stage, wherein invested parties decide and discuss exactly what they hope they might learn, prove, or reveal by interrogating public policy initiatives or designing public programs (Smith & Larimer, 2011). Similarly, most research on such cases in the field is carried out in the form of an “impact study,” wherein researchers attempt to isolate variables as a means to understand and assess the value, effect, and worth of a policy, program, rule, or law (Smith & Larimer, 2011). These methods undoubtedly omit important information and effects, as evidenced in Peter Adams’ aforementioned research at ECC (Adams, Gearhart, Miller, et al., 2009).

Either way, both the “agenda setting” stage and the “impact analysis” method of program evaluation are inextricably linked to positivist and post-positivist epistemologies and quantitative research designs. They are always looking to *capture* or *prove* something. Neither leave enough room for inquiry-based methodologies, methodologies capable of expressing student experience, all of which is further problematized once we consider the differentiation amongst researchers, research sites, research participants, and research projects.

While such methods are firmly rooted in positivist and post-positivist epistemologies, so are the governing forces of economics, politics, and the legal system—all of which decidedly honor these methods. This further complicates a discussion of ethics. That old adage: “The world thinks in numbers,” has some merit. If only researchers—and not political, economic, or legal agents—are concerned with issues of ethics and representation, advocacy researchers taking the moral high ground, by refusing to politicize research materials, may be forfeiting their ability to compete with agents interested in maintaining current power structures or adjusting them to benefit private interests.

Conducting research in education with a relational methodology may help remedy these crises. Given that relational sociology recognizes society as the network of relationships between agents, structure, and field, these political and economic contexts necessarily become a part of the research focus.

It is my belief, one that I hold with others (Stewart, 2010), that a qualitative research design oriented toward the analysis of policy implementation can only add to the assessment of higher education policies. These relationships, which I discuss in the sections that follow may or may not be representative of general trends. Either way they are still a part of the story. Still, they do not claim to be the whole story. Perhaps with enough of those stories with close attention

on their relationships to governing context, we might be able to piece together a better picture of public policies.

A Rationale for Relational Sociology

Relational sociology has gained popularity as a research methodology in the narrative study of health and illness. Given the intrinsic relationships between patients and the structures of hospitals and the field of medicine, such a methodology permits the exchange of dialogue between agents and structures or fields. Its focus is on the relationship between these aspects, on the expression of impact, rather than expression *or* impact. This is described in short as follows:

Quantitative research can define, and support, clinical solutions such as medical outcomes and efficacy, although quantitative research seldom provides insight into an individual experience. Positivist research, although very useful, has its limitations especially when exploring a person's individual experiences. People's experiences matter, but often traditional positivistic research investigates outcomes, ignoring the individual and not capturing the influence of the ordeal itself. (Haydon & van der Reit, 2016, p. 85)

Hayden & van der Reit recognize that positivist research and quantitative methodologies dismiss the individual experience. That should be clear, but relational methodologies also represent the “descriptions of an individual's experience of their situation, reflected by surroundings, such as hospitals, previous illness and life experience” (Hayden & van der Reit, 2016, p. 88), namely relational methodology emphasizes the interaction between individuals and the structures habituating them.

In the field of education, we see many of the same problems. Quantitative research often prescribes, recommends, and evaluates the impact of educational models, policies, curricula, or

technique. But in a field with such close focus on students and individuals, we often lose the forest amongst the trees. Relational sociology provides a useful methodology for both conducting and analyzing educational research with an emphasis on students, instructors, and the structures and fields of institutions and policies. It helps us see the trees that make up the forest.

Methods

This a study of students' stories, stories of how they perceive, experience, and represent their education as they navigate remedial coursework at community colleges. This is not a study of attrition rates, rates of persistence, rates of graduation, or really rates of anything at all, though these statistics are treated as important contexts. The focus of this study is on the relationships between students and those contexts. While such methods may reflect general trends, it is my belief that the stories of the students who experience these policies might further develop our understandings of how these trends are both a) experienced first-hand and b) related to larger fields of power.

Some of these methods borrow from researchers and theorists who might identify or be identified as phenomenological. Still, this is not a phenomenological study. For one, in a study like this it would be impossible, and perhaps even problematic, for me to bracket my perspectives, experiences, and stances on these issues. Edmund Husserl (2001) wrote that it would be critical for any phenomenological researcher to "bracket" his or her own biases, emotions, and impulses when conducting qualitative research. This process intended to serve as a means to observe uninterrupted phenomena and analyze subjects' experiences and responses to said phenomena. I have come to recognize that such an exercise would be impossible for me. These problems were my problems. These participants were me and my friends, and today they are my students.

While the methods presented here may borrow from phenomenological research, I have reconceptualized them to work as a part of Bourdieu's relational sociology and Field Theory by considering them as representative of perspective rather than experience when it comes to reporting on the relationship between agents, structures, and the field. In the section that follows, I outline the methods I use to preserve students' and instructors' stories, while situating them within the larger frame and contexts of structure and field.

The most obvious way to do this was to assemble a series of case-studies (Geering, 2007) as a means to capture the "messy complexity of human experience" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p.3). By assembling a series of interviews (Rapley, 2002) and asking participants to produce a series of written narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), (Vagle, 2016), I hope to relay a frank and honest representation of what it means to experience and negotiate the traffic of remediation and financial aid policies at community colleges.

Selection of Participants

Keeping in mind that this study does not intended to make causal claims, I selected participants not as a means to generate an accurate or microcosmic representation of the community college at large, but rather as a means to access and explore the complexities and nuances of policy implementation and the practice of remediation, as experienced by students. Thus, first and foremost, participants were chosen based on their academic placement as incoming freshman. Participants who were chosen had enrolled in ENG000 Developmental Reading, ENG010 Developmental Writing, and ENG12 Developmental Writing (Accelerated Learning Program) all of which are ascending remedial prerequisites² for ENG101: College Writing—the standard freshman writing course.

² Students enrolled in ENG12 are concurrently enrolled in ENG101.

With the goal of generating a holistic portrait of the intersection of policy and remediation at the community college, I chose a total of five participants—two who were currently enrolled in developmental coursework at the community college, one who was formerly enrolled in developmental coursework (within the past 10 years), and two instructors who teach developmental coursework (See Table 1). It is my belief that these perspectives will best represent the experiences in developmental English and higher education policy at the community college, as these policies often influence not only a student’s experience in the classroom but also the dynamic between students and instructors.

Table 1. Research Participants

| Participant | Status |
|--------------------|---|
| Joey | Dropped out of ENG000 |
| Meryem | Currently Enrolled in ENG12 |
| Patrick | Currently Enrolled in ENG010 |
| Barbara | Adjunct Instructor in ENG010 at SPCC |
| Melody | Associate Professor in ENG010 & ENG12 at SPCC |

These three perspectives amongst five participants present a dynamic reflection of the related fields of power represented in this study. Similarly, the connections I’ve made between them reflect their shared experiences as agents in the field of higher education. One of these participants, Joey, ultimately dropped out of SPCC. He is currently employed in a heavy machinery rental company and considering reenrolling the college to pursue a career in law enforcement. Patrick, a military veteran, is currently enrolled at SPCC. He is majoring in radio and television production. Meryem, a second-generation Turkish immigrant and freshman at SPCC is unemployed but seeking a career in art and business. Barbara is an adjunct lecturer, a

doctoral candidate in higher education organization and leadership, and has years of experience in student support services. Melody is a tenured professor. She earned her PhD from an Ivy League University in medieval studies and linguistics. She has taught developmental coursework at SPCC regularly for over a decade.

Research Design

Given that this study is rooted in Bourdieuan sociology, the overall design is modeled as a *bricolage*, “a pieced-together set of representations that is fitted to the specifics of a complex situation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.4). Such a model supports the methodology of relational sociology, as it privileges the relationships between various agents, fields, and structures, all while maintaining a central focus on the distribution and circulation of capital and power. It is my belief that such a model would work best in capturing the multiple and varied nuances and particularities of these participants and their stories. As a means to do this best, I adopted a multi-method approach (Flick, 2013) to a multi-case study (Stake, 2000), comprised of semi-structured interviews (Rapley, 2002) and narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), (Vagle, 2016) as well as chronicle my own observations and memos.

This study took place over a four-month period—the duration of the fall 2018 semester at South Pine Community College. During that time two interviews were administered to the student participants, while one interview was administered to teaching faculty. Each interview ran approximately 45 minutes. Prior to the first student interview, student participants were prompted to write a short narrative outlining their experiences with developmental coursework at SPCC. They were asked to consider specifics such as their experiences with classroom content, their instructors, their peers, financial aid, registrar, academic advisement, and the academic placement examination (See Table 2).

Table 2. Data Sources

| Research Question | Data Sources |
|--|--|
| 1. How do students enrolled in remedial coursework experience and negotiate policy implementation? | Interviews 1 & 2 with current students and former students. Student narratives. |
| 2. How do students and faculty perceive the ways remediation and policy intersect at community colleges? | Interviews 1 & 2 with current students and former students. Interview with the instructors. Student narratives. |
| 3. How do policy decisions influence a students' decision about attending or remaining in a community college? | Interviews 1 & 2 with current and former students. Student narratives. |

In the section that follows, I outline the particulars of this study. By administering multiple sets of interviews, asking participants to complete narratives and tracking my own observations through memos, I do not attempt to *validate* the study, but rather to *crystallize* it. As rather than assume that these outcomes prove anything, “crystals grow, change, alter... Crystals are prism that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions” (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2005, p. 934). Such an understanding of meaning-making supports the theoretical underpinning of this project, that meaning, understanding, and in fact societies, are created through the interactions and relationships between participants and contexts, or agents, structures, and the field.

A Multi-Case Study

The multi-case study creates an opportunity for dialogue and interaction between participants and their responses, which I believe speaks directly to the Bourdieuan approach I

take in my research methodology and theoretical framework. The following cases not only work well to articulate the experiences of the participants but may also interact and crystalize in meaningful ways (Stake, 2000). I have chosen five cases, because any less would not allow for enough dialogue and interaction, while any more might invite too many disparate experiences and begin to obfuscate the data (Stake, 2000) (Geering, 2007).

Data Collection

Interviews. Given the nature of this study, and my own involvement in the data and the site, interviews provided a good opportunity for “the joint production of *accounts* or *versions* of experiences, emotions, identities, knowledges, opinion, truth, etc.” (Rapley, 2002, p. 16).

Interviews with multiple participants produce an opportunity for a range of experiences and perspectives (Rubin & Rubin, 1995), which could help represent what happens when policy and remediation intersect, overlap, or collide at community colleges.

Interviews are conducted in a semi-structured format, wherein I approach the interview with pre-written questions but support participant-led discussions. This does, at times, approach a collaborative or active format wherein, “interviewer and respondent tell a story together” (Denzin, 2012). Such a design allows for greater dialogue, not just between the participants, their narratives, and their histories, but also with the researcher, working with what Johnson (2002) calls a “complimentary reciprocity” wherein there is an exchange of ‘some form of help, assistance, or other form of information’ (Johnson, 2002, p. 288).

The number of interviews and specific interview questions vary depending on participants. Participants currently enrolled in developmental coursework at community colleges are interviewed twice—once at the beginning of their semester and once at the conclusion of their semester. This allows for the students to check their assumptions against their experiences,

an important aspect of research indebted to relational sociology. Participants who are no longer enrolled in such coursework and the instructor of the course will only be interviewed once.

While I am interested in how these three groups answer some of the same questions, as a means to ask fewer leading questions and generate a more holistic portrait of these experiences, most of their questions will differ.

Interviews were conducted over the phone and are digitally recorded. Memos were recorded at this time. All audio files were transcribed but at a later date. The first interview (see Appendix A) with students currently enrolled at SPCC was recorded during the first few weeks of the semester. This interview was primarily concerned with understanding students' expectations of developmental coursework and initial feelings about their placement and experiences at the college. Open-ended questions approach the students' experience with respect to the course curriculum, the instructor's pedagogy, and the English department. More specific questions target their experiences with office of financial aid, and the office of the registrar, all of which commensurate and organize credit hours and points differently. The second set of interviews (see Appendix B) with participants currently enrolled at SPCC was completed at the end of the semester, but before students received their final grades. This affords them an opportunity to reflect on their experiences in developmental coursework without coloring their perspective based on evaluation or assessment. At this point, together, we revisited some of the participants' earlier assumptions and discuss their experience of, and the outcome in, the course.

Interviews with the instructor (see Appendix C) and former students (see Appendix D) were not conducted on such a rigid timeline. I met with Joey, Barbara and Meryem around the middle of the term. The interview with the former students focused primarily on his experiences at SPCC and how much developmental education played a role in those experiences. The

interviews with instructors at SPCC provide an important, albeit general, representation of students and their interactions with administrative offices concerning developmental English coursework.

All data was ultimately coded and organized into a coding matrix (see Table 3) as a means to generate a clearer portrait of the participants' experiences and responses. This coding matrix was used to structure the analysis I represent in chapters 4 and 5.

Table 3. Coding Matrix

| Code | Sub-code |
|-------------|--|
| Experiences | Between agents Between agents and structures Between agents and the field |
| Capital | Cultural (embodied or institutionalized) Social (embodied or institutionalized) Symbolic |
| Tensions | Tension between agents Tension between agents and structure Tension between agents and field |
| Constraints | Structure constrains agency Field constrains agency Other agents constrain agency |

Narratives. While interviews provide a useful skeleton for a study such as this, narrative inquiry represents an equally important means for data production. Narrative inquiry provides a good

method for considering the dynamic interactions between individuals and events. It is a “collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

All participants, excluding the instructors, were asked to complete one short narrative exploring or revisiting a conflict or experience they have had at the community college. These conflicts or experiences must be specific to the developmental English course but may or may not deal specifically with course content. Responses confronting institution or departmental policy were welcome. These narratives, which I received before the first set of interviews allowed me to ask more pointed questions based off of what they relayed as their experiences at the community college so far.

Participants’ narratives were prompted by an adaptation of Max Van Manen’s (2001) lived experience description (LED) framework (see Appendix E). The lived experience descriptions framework provides the scaffolding necessary for capturing and representing their experiences at SPCC. Such a “less formal writing protocol can be... helpful in providing... good access to the phenomenon and the myriad of intentional meanings that circulate through the lifeworld” (Vagle, 2016, p. 87).

Data Analysis

Originally, I intended to root this study in grounded theory, which I believe would have provided a useful framework and methodology for developing a theoretical model based on the relationships between the participants’ experiences at the college and the participants’ experiences within the context of structure and field. While it became clear that relational sociology represented the best choice in terms of data collection and analysis, this study retains vestiges of grounded theory. For instance, the use of a coding matrix, while typically a tool for

organizing, saturating, and targeting data outcomes in grounded theory, is for this study simply an organizational tool, aimed at addressing the relationships between participants and various aspects of Field Theory.

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe coding data as “*heuristic*—a method of discovery. You determine the code for a chunk of data by careful reading and reflection on its core content or meaning” (p. 73). The data in this study was organized into four primary coding families and then subdivided into ten individual codes as a means to discern connections across interviews, participants, narratives, and my notes (see Table 3). Once the data was organized, I revisited Bordieuan epistemologies to locate meaningful moments in the data.

The discussion that follows in chapters 4 through 6 is organized into case studies and a holistic analysis of the participants’ perspectives, but the content of that discussion is organized around meaningful moments—what I am calling “contact points.” For the purposes of this study, a “contact point” represents any disagreement or agreement about how remediation or policy initiatives are experienced amongst the participants. It is an expression of how the participants experience policy implementation at the community college.

While agreements would typically represent the most significant findings, a study such as this necessarily privileges both consent as well as dissent, as the latter might represent a more nuanced and individual experience. For example, two students might have different experiences concerning navigating the office of admissions depending on their parents’ educational attainment. The difference in their experiences in the field might then be explained by their access to various forms of social and cultural capitals.

Whole-part-whole analysis. Vagle (2016) describes the whole-part-whole method of qualitative data analysis as evolving from the assumption that “we must always think about focal meanings

(e.g., moments) in relation to the whole (e.g., broader context) from which they are situated—and once we begin to remove parts from one context and put them in dialogue with other parts, we end up creating new analytic whole that have particular meanings in relation to the phenomenon” (p. 97). The whole-part-whole method is broken into six steps:

1. Holistic reading of the entire text
2. First line-by-line reading
3. Follow-up questions
4. Second line-by-line reading
5. Third line-by-line reading
6. Subsequent readings

(adapted from Vagle, 2016, p. 99)

This helps the researcher recognize the significant isolated instances in a participant’s narrative while also maintaining a healthy respect for relationships with surrounding contexts. Both of which may generate meaningful findings.

While Vagle argues that this method promotes a phenomenologically oriented research, I contend that such a design may work best for a study oriented around Field Theory, given the fact that the intrinsic complexities of Field Theory necessitate multiple readings, follow-up questions, and a holistic analysis of the data within relevant context and related fields of power.

Positioning the Research

The experiences represented here are site-specific, individual, and above all else, personal. They are not presented in order to discern any general trends (though they may reflect them), nor are they represented with the intent of modeling policy to these specific constraints. While this study does not make claims of causality, the fact remains that these experiences are

authentic and important. While the data present in the sections that follow may not be stable enough to form the foundations of progressive policy, it may be useful in terms of producing dialogue between not just students and their instructors but ultimately students, administrators, law-makers and policy makers. The material presented here is presented as an outline for adopting a more equitable stance on policy-making.

It is also my suspicion that while the stories expressed by the participants in the following chapters could be considered isolated incidents, there are many stories and students *like* the ones represented in this study. It is my hope that a project like this can provide a foundation from which these responses might be linked, into the relationships, because as Bourdieu (1982) describes “the acts or discourses they produce, has meaning except relationally, by virtue of the interplay of oppositions and distinctions” (p. 185).

CHAPTER FOUR

Discussion of Data from Students

From my experience, and in my research, I have come to understand that the problems of admitting and retaining developmental writers are complex. They are not solely the result of calculated political maneuvers. Rather they are most palpably experienced because of poor policy design and messy policy implementation. Those experiences matter, and these missteps and flaws in design and implementation obfuscate the field, making it nearly impossible for students with less resources and less cultural and social capital, to see their way through. As one student put it, “In every step along the way, we had to do more because we had less” (Jemott, 2019)

In this chapter, I present three such cases in Joey, Meryem, and Patrick. In each case, these students attempt to navigate the traffic and complexities of intersecting structures in the field of higher education—from financial aid, to admissions, to remediation. From a Bourdieuan stance, I interpret structures, agents, fields and subfields as they are couched in context, respective to the overall fields of power and in the pursuit and exchange of social, cultural, and symbolic capital. These cases, and the stories in them, represent the overlapping, intersecting, conflicting, and complimentary aspects of navigating remediation, financial aid, and administrative policy at the community college.

In the first of my cases, Joey, who views higher education as a way to better his position in the field and secure both gainful and meaningful professional employment, struggles to stay motivated in his developmental coursework as his understanding of college and its relationship to social and symbolic capital flexes and shifts. Similarly, Meryem, a first-generation learner and second-generation immigrant, struggles to find her position in the field and succeed in college after she is tagged as developmental reader and writer. She manages to preserve her motivation by

leaning into her work-ethic, grit, and problem-solving skills, but these skills and strategies are called into question by the complexities of financial aid and admissions policies. And in Patrick, a veteran student and adult learner, we see someone who has struggled in school and internalized the words of his teachers and the habits of his family. When it becomes clear that he never took a college placement exam, he is reluctant to investigate how he wound up in both developmental Math and developmental English. His discomfort in questioning his status in the field will result in lost subsidies from the GI Bill, funds that could have been applied to the back end of his academic studies.

It is true that less than 25% of developmental students persist and attain an associate's degree within eight years, but these statistics miss an important part of this story (Bailey, Jeong & Cho, 2010). When the other 75% of students dropped out of their remedial courses something *happened*. When quantitative analysts observe trends of attrition, they recognize a symptom, but they often miss the etiology. Thus, it is important to hear these stories from the students; from a Bourdieuan frame they represent students' *perspectives* on their position as agents in related fields of power. For example, rates of persistence amongst developmental reading students are simply abstractions until Joey describes his reading courses as a waste of time and that he made a calculated decision to leave the community college to find work instead. The complexity of financial aid is well documented (Durband & Britt, 2012), but it comes to life when Meryem admits that she was afraid to be "locked in jail" if she filed her application incorrectly. And the fact that thousands of veteran students were defrauded by predatory institutions following the second world war means nothing until you talk to Patrick, an army veteran who left a career in corrections to pursue a dream in audio-video production. Each of these circumstances positions these agents

differently in the field, but it is from the relationships between these agents, these structures, and the field as a whole, that we can begin to construct meaning.

Accordingly, I view these cases as kinetic parts of a dynamic and shifting field. As I present the data here, I am reminded of my father photographing the stock cars at Watkins Glen. Individually, Joey, Meryem, and Patrick are running their own races, but together they represent a complex assemblage of moving parts. As they change positions, they relate to one another in different ways, highlighting the tensions, complexities, and nuances of how students experience policy implementation in developmental courses at community colleges.

In the pages that follow, I invite you into the worlds of Joey, Meryem, and Patrick, just as they invited me. Each of their cases are organized into two sections: “Agency in the Field” and “Interactions with Policy Structures.” These, I believe, best organize the cases according to Field Theory and Pierre Bourdieu’s relational sociology by representing how the relative aspects of fields of power work together, in what Pierre Bourdieu calls “habitus,” to construct agents’ sense of positionality, and how in the field of higher education, structures like aid eligibility, academic standing, and credit commensuration paired with habituating structures like home-life and family history influence students’ perception and experience of their position in the field and in education as a whole.

Case Study: Joey

“I just ended up like... I stopped going, started working, and blah-blah...”

In the quote above, Joey was explaining to me why he once again dropped away from postsecondary education. Joey’s story is important, specifically because it is not extraordinary. There’s a “what’s the big deal” feeling to his words here, one that emphasizes that Joey’s unceremonious departure from higher education represents the banality of college attrition, and

the commonalty of his struggles and experiences highlight the current social, political, and economic zeitgeists underpinning each of the following cases.

Joey was hard to track down. He agreed to our interview in early August, but it took months to get him on the phone. When we finally spoke, the industrial whirl of heavy machinery muddled his voice. At several times he apologized for the sound. We lost connection twice. Our conversation was brief, but Joey was generous with his time. A few minutes into our interview, it became clear that he was on his lunch break.

Joey is my cousin. He is the second born on my mother's side. We are separated by only a few years, and having grown up together, our interview necessarily took on an awkward energy. It was hard to get past the fact that I was a doctoral candidate writing about college dropouts while Joey was the one who had dropped out. Today, Joey works for an equipment and heavy machinery rental company in a working-class suburb outside of New York City. Since dropping out of college, Joey has juggled multiple jobs as a boxing coach, a delivery driver, and now filling orders at the machine shop. He lives in Brooklyn.

While he is struggling today, Joey grew up comfortably, with finances secured by his father's job in computer sales. Somewhere along the way he fell between the cracks. Coming from a family with an income above the cut-off for need-based state and federal grants and awards, Joey was ineligible for funding from programs like New York State's Tuition Assistance Program. He struggled through high school, so merit-based awards were out, too. He placed into developmental reading when he enrolled in college. He, like the majority of community college students in America, had to rely entirely on student loans as he entered college, at a time when costs would be higher than ever.

From a Bourdieuan stance, we might argue that Joey was positioned according to his relationship amongst structures like financial aid eligibility, academic performance, and socio-economic status, all of which sort and organization agents into positions, classes, and demographics. From my perspective, Joey is an average, perhaps even archetypal, community college student, and thus he represents an important base perspective for this study. I have met many students like him while teaching and learning at community colleges. What is clear both from my professional perspective and the Bourdieuan lens is that students, like Joey, at community colleges are habituated into behaving according to the prescription of their position in the field.

While Joey seems the most “average” of my participants, our conversations revealed that he, of the three profiled students, seemed to have the hardest time at the community college, struggling academically but also with making sense of the purpose or reason for college. When he reflects on those struggles, he indicates that remediation, in particular, obfuscated the path and muddled his understanding of the reason or purpose of higher education, while college cost always lingered in the back of his mind. Although it is impossible to say with certainty that Joey dropped out specifically because of his lack of aid—he, himself, indicates it wasn’t costs incurred, but frustration, impatience, and the desire to begin working—there are implications in his stated reasons for leaving that suggest that the cost of an education played some part.

In this section, I explore first how Joey has been conditioned into believing that college is solely about bettering his socio-economic standing by analyzing his descriptions of past educational and work experiences. In the latter portion of this section, I examine how policy structures like remediation, placement, and admissions make it difficult for Joey to see how college will help change his position in the field, which he describes as the primary reason for his attrition.

As I present Joey's case, I do so through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's relational sociology and Field Theory, considering how the parts of the field, structures like financial aid and placement, affect how Joey thinks about himself, his experiences, and his place in both the field of education as well as society as a whole.

Agency in the Field: Joey's Experiences at Community College

Joey views college as a practical resource. He rarely refers to himself as a student and frequently refers to college as the "degree." This implies that for Joey, college represents a form of symbolic capital, what Bourdieu described as simply "a transformed and thereby disguised form of physical 'economic' capital" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 183). As Joey treats college like a tool, he becomes frustrated when it won't yield the results he is looking for. In this section, I highlight the tensions present in Joey's interview, as he struggles to find purpose, remain motivated, and persist amongst developmental coursework at the community college.

Purpose and transparency. From the beginning of our interview, Joey expressed frustration with the community college. He'd dropped out of the community college twice, because he'd found it meaningless. Since then he'd enrolled in, and subsequently dropped out, of an online learning program at another school, but he'd had more success there. I asked him why.

100% I go at my own pace. Because everybody is different, so it's like I could speed up at times when it would be taking days for us to do something, and maybe something that's a little simpler for other people, I can slow down and keep drilling it into my head... My grades were completely... My grades at [the online school], if you saw them compared to my grades at SPCC... If I continued, I would have gotten a two-point-something. My grades at [the online school] were like a 3.7, which is ridiculous. It doesn't look like it's the same person taking the classes.

This excerpt highlights Joey's general philosophy of education. He speaks in quantitative metrics like grade-point average and assumes that if he struggles, "drilling it into" his head will solve the problem. For Joey, higher education is a series of practical exchanges. More struggle means better grades; better grades mean higher averages, and higher averages means a more meaningful degree. At the end of all of this, the degree is exchanged for an ameliorated position and socio-economic status in a professional field.

While there is no shortage of research and arguments on the pragmatism and pedagogical value of online learning, what works for Joey is the independence. It seems like going at his "own pace" is less about embracing differentiated learning and more about giving Joey the agency to focus on what he believes is valuable. This laissez-faire form of education works for him.

When he says he could "speed up at times when it would be taking us days to do something," he says it with a sense of frustration. It is almost as if he could recall instances when lectures droned on, when the purpose of his education—accruing that symbolic capital—became hazy if it didn't disappear altogether.

When he is going at his own pace, and working on his own, he can make the work purposeful. Joey is someone who needs to know there is a goal in sight. For example, when Joey reflects on his online learning classes, he admired the pragmatism, efficiency, and transparency of his courses.

But the way it was. With the bio class—I really liked it—if I ever needed him, I could e-mail him or call him, and he would help me out. It was just.... He also teaches at [another nearby university], so he had all of these lectures of him just talking in front of a camera, and we would just watch the lectures. Say, watch 1 – 3, and then answer the questions in

the packet labeled 1 -3. Then you would take a test on 1 – 3. And I ended up just doing really well in that.

Joey's celebration of his biology class speaks to his underlying philosophy of education, namely that it is a tool to adjust your position in related fields of power. In a certain sense, this class works the same way, albeit on a smaller scale. Lectures, exams, and packets all serve as structures in the field of this course, while Joey's ability to navigate them effectively adjusts his position in a meaningful way. When Joey can connect the dots, he stays motivated, and ultimately enrolled.

The transparency of this course seems to be what works for Joey. He understands, and believes it to be fair, that an exam should be directly connected to lectures and questions on the same topics. While this might at first seem like an overly simplistic idea, Joey is getting at a complex and nuanced aspect of higher education. Very often, students fail not because they cannot complete the coursework, but because they cannot navigate the complexities of the institution. If things were simply clearer, or students were better equipped to understand and navigate the college, there would be more success.

Work, school, and social positioning. Judging by the fact that Joey views college based on its practical payoff, by how it could adjust his position in related fields of power, it is not a surprise that he treats work the same way. Since Joey understands that both work and school have an influence on his social standing, he vacillates between quitting jobs to go to school and dropping out of school to go to work. In either situation, he switches from one to the other out of a sense of purposelessness or frustration.

Joey talks about work and school as interrelated structures, and it is clear that he recognizes higher education as a way of securing a better position in professional or vocational

fields. For Joey, higher education has little or no value if it doesn't resituate one's position or accrue the capital necessary for resituating one's position in related fields of power. When I asked Joey about whether or not he believed college was worth it, he responded:

I feel like that can't be answered with a yes or no. Like, depending on what you're doing, if you're gonna need it in your career. If you go away for four years or stay home. If you do it the right way, I think it 100% is... Like, there's no reason to go away and take the same classes you would at a community college when you're going to be paying—what—a 16th of it?

Here, Joey is clear in his argument about college's contingency on whether or not "you're gonna need it in your career." He also weighs the costs of living on campus against "staying home" at the two-year college. All of this amounts to a cost-benefit analysis. Joey situates these aspects into a paradigm and examines whether or not the end result is a net-loss or a net-gain in capital, status, and social positioning.

It is important to remember that we should not hold Joey accountable for this belief. It is a common ideological trend, what Pierre Bourdieu calls the *doxa*, that perpetuates such ways of thinking. Joey, like anyone who has attended college in the United States, has been saturated with the belief that college is a springboard, a starting-point, or a way to set yourself up for success. While such claims might legitimately be called into question given the severity of the student debt crisis and the cost of college, the *doxa* remains—college is viewed as a way to resituate your position in the field.

Still, underpinning Joey's beliefs about the worth of college is a support for the community college. He is impressed by the price-point reduction, especially given the ballooning cost of college and the dearth of professional positions available to augment such debt. Such an

awareness implies Joey's attention to and understanding of his position in the field, the capital he has available, and the doxa and habitus aimed at reproducing class structures.

In general, I got the general sense that Joey was thinking about college in terms of dollars and cents. In the quote above, Joey weighs the costs of not only tuition but also room and board, and balances those against what one might "need in your career," which he reasons is the "right way." These arguments imply that Joey is thinking about his education not only as an individual experience in the field of education but also within the related context of the policy arena.

Even if he cannot articulate it, Joey is able to see beyond his own individual experience, discern greater meaning, and observe general trends when it comes to the related fields of higher education and higher education policy. When he discusses his decision to return to college, he recognizes that he had a "solid job" and "could definitely make some money with it, so [he] stopped [attending college]" but understands that he could not "do this for the rest of [his] life." He calls this epiphany his "reality check."

Calculating cost. There is a circuitousness to Joey's habits at the community college. He first attended the college to look for a job, but left the college to look for work, only to reenroll after becoming frustrated with his job. As I write this chapter, Joey is not enrolled in college, though he has thoughts of returning. At this point however, college has become even more pragmatic. While it may have once held some vestige of cultural capital, it has become purely and simply symbolic capital. When he returns, which he assures me he will, he is not interested in taking classes organized in any program of study. Rather, he simply seeks to accrue the 60 credits necessary for taking the police test.

Because Joey seems so motivated to return to school, I asked what motivated his most recent decision to leave. He put it simply: "I just stopped going, because I wanted to work." His

response as to why he quit his job, however, may reveal deeper tensions and relationships between structure and field:

So what happened was I got a really good... not really good, but a solid job. I could definitely make some money with it, so I stopped. But while I was doing it was like—“Wow, this is cool,” I was making money, but then like kind of a fucking reality check, “Like, I cannot do this for the rest of my life,” so I’m gonna go get my degree. I’ll probably go end up being a cop or something, something I would like... Um, and then so now I’m doing all of those applications now.

When Joey clarifies the distinction between a “really good” and a “solid job,” he indicates that the “solid job” is one in which he could “definitely make some money.” The “reality check” comes when he imagines himself doing this for the rest of his life, but when he says that he cannot work menial labor for the rest of his life *so* he will “go get [his] degree,” he is operationalizing his college education.

Here, Joey may be recognizing the common doxa of college as the key to social mobility and treats education as a form of symbolic capital. Joey never references his classes. He does, however, reference the degree—which Bourdieu (1982) describes as an institutionalized form of cultural capital or symbolic capital. For Joey, a college degree is something close to a union card. While he has moments in which he thinks about education as an opportunity for *meaningful* employment, a career based on his interests in which he feels existentially satisfied, he always returns to pragmatism, considering college instead a tool for adjusting his status and position in related fields of power.

When Joey says that he will “probably go end up being a cop or something,” there is a sense of ambiguity in his phrasing, but it also feels a little bit like he is giving up. Joey is not

specific about entering law enforcement or corrections. The phrase “a *cop* or something” could easily be “a *nurse* or something,” or a “*teacher* or something.” The implication here is that that this is a decent job that requires college training. As a society constructed from networks and relationships, we view careers such as these not as professional specializations but rather as symbolic capital: resources cataloged according to prestige, honor, and extrinsic value.

Connections. As Joey considers the next stage of his academic career, he is motivated by the transparency outlining the path to a career in law enforcement. Those 60 credits are so clear that they are almost tangible. There is no program of study, no pre-requisites, and no ambiguity. 60 is 60, and for Joey a career in law enforcement seems to hold enough of cultural or symbolic capital to satisfy his need for growth. Still, I can’t help but wonder if he is giving in here, if he has been habituated into believing that college is a tool and not a resource.

In this section, I’ve outlined how Joey identifies the community college as a context and structure capable of resituating his position in professional and vocational fields. Joey appears to view the community college as a site to gain symbolic and institutionalized forms of cultural capital. His frequent usage of the terms “degree” and “credit” appear to imply that he recognizes the community college not as a place to pursue the liberal arts or humanistic education but instead a site to gain social, cultural, and symbolic capital. There is a distance between him and his studies, much in the way there is distance between people making a financial transaction. It is not as though Joey doesn’t *care* about his education, but it is clear that he sees it as *procedural*.

Such an operational reading of higher education highlights the Bourdieuan frame of this study. In the following section, I explore how administrative policies and remediation in particular compounds these issues. Because Joey has trouble finding purpose in ambiguous college bureaucracies, college remediation presents a unique challenge. He finds it nearly impossible to

stay motivated in his developmental reading course, for which there are no grades, and no clearly defined standards or learning outcomes. While college remediation positions him as a developmental student, it is clear that he rejects this identity position, which preserves his sense of confidence and self-worth but also makes it difficult for him to maintain motivation in a course he views is simply an obstacle as well as an expense. In the next section, I consider how policies like remediation, admissions, and placement color Joey's perception of the college, himself, and perhaps most importantly the dynamic and overlapping fields of higher education and higher education policy.

Interactions with Policy Structures

Joey's belief that community college is solely about adjusting his social or economic position makes it so that every move within the college must be clearly directed toward the end goal. That goal is, more or less, graduating, but it is not about the school, the classes, or even the graduation. It's about the symbolic capital of the college degree, which could then be exchanged for a better social position within related fields of power. This makes remediation a problem. Remedial English is obscure if not hazy. It is difficult to define outside of deficit orientation, and few understand how it can be assessed or how it can be taught. Few developmental students understand how it affects their academic standing.

Joey, however, is acutely aware of how remediation affects his academic standing. After taking his placement exam, Joey was required to take a developmental reading course at SPCC, a non-credited prerequisite to freshman writing. While the effects of remediation are often discussed in terms of a stigmatized identity, Joey seemed to shrug this off, focusing instead on the frustration associated with delayed graduation and an obfuscated path toward credit commensuration.

In this section, I examine how policies at the community college behave as structures in the field of higher education and influence Joey's experiences while having a palpable effect on his progress through the program. I look specifically at how placement examinations and the practice and policies of college remediation impact student experience by simultaneously depriving them of the social and cultural capital associated with being a college student while also operating as sorting structures aimed at preserving the culture and status of the college. Through Joey's words, and the philosophies of Bourdieu, I examine how policies pertaining to these two structures, academic placement and college remediation, work both in terms of habituating one's sense of self while also presenting practical obstacles and impediments to success at the community college.

Assessment and placement. I believe that Joey can read at the college level, even though his high-school grades were below average, and he placed into developmental reading courses at SPCC. The kind of work he does, processing complex orders over the phone and online necessitates expedient and technical reading abilities. Joey knows this, too. When I ask him about how he placed into developmental reading, he describes his assessment test:

Yeah, just like a bunch of stuff that I did not remember at all, because it was like so far removed from my brain... it [the test] wasn't really explained. I wasn't sure what was gonna be on it. Yeah, I knew I was gonna be taking a test, but I didn't know what it was going to be like.

Joey is unclear of exactly how he was placed into remediation, because he sounds unclear about the exam itself. He knows his placement was based on the exam, but he did not really understand how the exam was organized or assessed.

It is interesting that in his criticism of the exam, he never states that he believes he doesn't need the course. Instead, his critique is focused on the obscurity surrounding the exam itself. He laments, "it wasn't really explained. I wasn't sure what was gonna be on it." Again, Joey's frustrations seem inextricably linked to the practical aspects of higher education, how structures like placement, assessment, and remediation function ultimately to adjust his position in related fields of power.

Joey never outright protests his placement, and perhaps this is because he is habituated into believing he needs remedial education, but it may also be worth considering that he doesn't protest his developmental courses, because he is simply willing to work through them. Since Joey doesn't really believe in college as a form of cultural capital, but rather as symbolic capital, he doesn't worry about whether or not the class means anything in terms of academics. He worries about what the course means in terms of commensuration. Perhaps he wonders—what does this course do for my degree? But not, what does this course do for my education?

Developmental reading. For Joey in particular, college remediation represents an obstacle—not because it is difficult, and not because he can't complete the work, but rather because he can't seem to find the value in sitting through uncredited classes. In this sense, college remediation operates as a structure in the field. By working to push Joey out of the college, it could be argued that remediation thus serves the function of maintaining the flow of capital in larger fields of power, all in the interest of preserving a common doxa.

When Joey sits in developmental reading classes, he's forced to confront this type of structure. Because Joey doesn't believe he needs the course intellectually or academically, he is twice as likely to drop out of it once he recognizes that it is not-credited. He describes this when he expresses his frustration with his developmental reading course:

...I literally felt as though... just like... so much smarter than all of the morons in there. ... literally sitting in this English class, and listening to some of these people, not read—because that would be giving them too much credit—but try to read actually out loud, like a simple paragraph... You shouldn't be able to take... I don't know... It just removed me from that. Cause I cannot sit there and just relearn basic stuff. I technically need it, but...

Joey took long pauses when he described his reading class. It was clear that he was simultaneously attempting to describe his frustration while also maintaining an awareness that his words might be misunderstood as mean-spirited or dismissive.

In the quote above, Joey was clearly frustrated, and he seemed to direct his frustration equally at his classmates as well as the content of the class, but what goes unspoken is that frustration underlying his experiences at the college in general. Joey cannot will himself to do something for which he sees no payoff. When Joey says that he cannot “relearn basic stuff,” even though he “technically need[s]” it, he expresses the incongruity between his academic needs and the college’s policies and protocol. He does not “need” the course to learn to read but rather “needs” the course to satisfy his prerequisite requirements for freshman writing. I get the sense that It would be easier for Joey to “sit through” this course if he could frame it as a prerequisite. In this sense, at least he is making progress towards his degree, at least the course plays a role in the field.

Joey thinks about school practically, which he cannot be blamed for. He situates his studies, his experiences, and his coursework in practical contexts and practical realities. This may best be understood as an acute understanding of the field of dynamic and overlapping fields of power as they are present in higher education and higher education policy. For Joey, college is a tool. It is a mechanism for adjusting his social and symbolic capital. He does not believe that he

is actualizing his identity there. Because of this remediation is not necessarily an insult to his identity. It is abundantly clear that he does not identify with his classmates in his developmental writing course, but it is equally clear that he is just as vulnerable as someone who might, because without the promise of steady progress through his degree or program, Joey is left—understandably—frustrated.

Coursework and credits. Joey, despite his apparent disinterest in academic pursuit, seems to have a high academic policy literacy. This became most clear when he described that he could secure a career in law enforcement or corrections simply by gathering 60 credits and that those credits did not need to be organized into any program of study. When he reflects on his experience at the college as one in which he “wasn’t working toward a degree... just working towards credits” he is not being sarcastic. It is clear to me, given the practical approach that he takes to education, that college, for Joey, is the accumulation of credits. He’s trying to make it work.

For Joey, credits, seem to represent incremental steps toward the shift in position that he seeks. They are, themselves, bits and fragments of cultural, social, and symbolic capital, regardless of how they accumulate, whether that be in a degree or in the 60-credit-point mark Joey needs to sit for the police test. This is most clearly articulated when Joey describes the credit requirements for sitting for the police test:

I wasn’t working towards a degree. I was just working towards credits...I’m doing all of those applications as now... like NYPD, all that shit. Connecticut, all of those tests, and then also in the meantime, cuz you need like 60 credits or whatever, so I gotta go back to school, too.

When Joey says that he has to “go back to school, too.” It almost sounds like an afterthought. The policies for the police exam simply require that he accrues the credits. His emphasis is clearly on the effect produced by accruing those credits.

The argument that Joey sees school as an afterthought is highlighted by the fact that he sees school as something that he’ll do in the “meantime.” By this logic, the “real” work comes when he applies to police precincts or when he has to study for his exam. Again, it is clear here that what works about this for Joey is the transparency.

Connections. Joey’s frustrations with the community college stem mostly from logistics. It is true that he has some lingering feelings about his aptitude, ability, and worth as a student, but I get the impression that his attrition has more to do with frustration than identity. Because Joey is uniquely literate in higher education policy, he is able to weight the costs of academic logistics, complexities, and bureaucracies against their returns. When I asked him whether college was worth it, he says it himself, “If you do it the right way, I think it 100% is.”

For Joey, “doing it the right way” means making it clear and making it make sense. I can’t help but lean into Joey’s personal history here. As a boxer, he knows the dangers of wasted movements. For Joey, college is about getting into a better position all without sacrificing too many of your own valuable resources.

Joey’s case had to come first, as it establishes an important base perspective to this study. In many ways, Joey’s words highlight the Bourdieuan framework undergirding this work. He sees himself as a student allotted certain capital, some of which he can operationalize for greater or lesser positions within the field. As he navigates structures like placement, assessment, and remediation, he is forced to confront the ways in which doxa is preserved within a field of power.

Joey came to the community college with some cultural capital withheld from the other two participants in this study. Most notably, his family's economic status, his gender, and his race (White) all converge to put him in a position of privilege, but he still did not graduate out of the community college within six years. He becomes a part of the amassed statistic mentioned earlier, wherein less than half of enrolled community college students persist or graduate within eight years (Bailey, Jeong, & Choo, 2010).

These aspects of Joey's case bear particular significance for this study. They situate his experiences within the larger policy conversation concerning aid-eligibility, rates of attrition, and socio-economic status, but they also come to represent his position as an agent in the field of higher education. His status as a fairly traditional college student from a reasonably comfortable socio-economic background makes him ineligible for more generous funding programs and certain need-based grants and awards, but he is the only participant in this study who does not persist.

All of this aims to state that Joey's case is not unique. Having dropped out of college myself, I wanted to articulate how leaving college is often only a partly-calculated decision. In many ways, if one lets life continue to unfold in the ways they are used to, college is simply pushed to the fringes. This appears to be the case for Joey, but deeper analysis through framework and methodology of relational sociology and Field Theory may help researchers understand why this happens. Joey drops out of college because he has been habituated into dropping out. He believes that college is simply about better one's position in fields of related power, so once it becomes unclear how his studies move towards this, he loses motivation.

In the following cases, both Meryem and Patrick share some of Joey's sentiments. All three focus primarily on the community college as a place to begin resituating one's status in fields of related power. In the next case study, Meryem explores many of these same issues, with the

additional aspect of enrolling as an underrepresented student. Her family is from Turkey. She and her sisters are the first to be born as American citizens, and yet she still struggles with many of the converging, overlapping, and intersection issues unique to the community college and college remediation.

Case Study: Meryem

“My financial aid experience was a very independent voyage, I went to the financial aids offices myself, I had to learned and research the types of Financial aid and scholarship opportunities I was available for like Tap and even filled the application out all by myself.”

When I asked Meryem, a first-generation learner and second-generation immigrant, to reflect on the admissions and enrollment processes at her community college, she was quick to note her ability to navigate the complicated structures of administrative offices like financial aid. In the quote above, she celebrates her autonomy and independence, both of which she credits for her success in college. While faculty and staff at both her high school and the community college outwardly identify Meryem as a struggling student, she chooses to frame her identity around the aspects she can control. As I came to learn, she frames it around her expediency and grit.

From a Bourdieuan stance, it is important to understand that Meryem’s shift from a “good-student” to a “hard-worker” might be recognized as an effect of the processes of habitus. Having apparently given up on academics, Meryem sought to match the abilities of her classmates and counterparts with grit and work-ethic. When she ruminates on navigating administrative offices on her own, she shows me two things: first, that she is proud of her ability to execute these tasks, and second that she recognizes the implicit value of procedural understandings and policy literacies.

Like Joey, Meryem recognizes the bureaucracy of higher education and higher education policy as related fields of power. During our interviews and in her written narrative, Meryem consistently described her ability to successfully manage these structures as related to her “blue-collar work ethic,” “problem solving skills” and identity as a “hard worker.” What stands out here, and what makes Meryem’s case so interesting, is how quickly she assumes the position of the academic outsider. Like Joey, Meryem—who placed into both developmental reading and developmental writing at SPCC—does *not* protest her academic status. Instead, she reframes her experience around her position in the field, which she describes as an “independent voyage.”

In her own words, Meryem is “an 18 year-old Turkish American.” She and her sister are the first in their family to attend college, so Meryem—like many first-generation college students—was left to figure most of college applications, admissions, and enrollment out on her own. Her mother, a homemaker, and her father, who owns a tile-setting company, struggle with reading and writing in English, so most of the applications—FAFSA included—became solely Meryem’s responsibility.

In the following sections, I discuss Meryem’s unique perspectives, observations, and experiences in developmental English and college finance at South Pine Community College. First, I consider how Meryem has been positioned by structures in related fields of power at her high school. This continues at the college, when she is placed into developmental English courses. I examine how Meryem reacts to these positions, how she seems to be habituated into believing that while she is not academically gifted, that she can *work* to meet the inherited privilege of her peers.

In the second section, I examine how Meryem relates to and behaves amongst various structures at the community college. In particular, I question how the complexities of financial

aid policy, paired with Meryem's habituated position of the "hard-worker" converge in a meaningful way in her developmental writing course. Because she identifies not as a strong student, but rather as a problem solver, Meryem is proud of her savvy ability to gain necessary information about college finance from her developmental English instructors, who may know little or nothing about college finance.

I raise the important question of whether or not this is a good thing when I recognize that Meryem is unaware of where her college funding is coming from, and whether or not she needs to pay it back. This problem is two-fold. First, there is the practical threat of mounting debt and college cost. If Meryem is taking loan-debt beyond that she cannot payoff, she will struggle upon graduation. But second, since Meryem's identity hinges on her ability to successfully navigate these offices and processes, what happens to her sense of self if she gets it wrong?

In these two sections, I examine how habitus, structure, and field relate and overlap in meaningful ways at the community college. Because Meryem has been habituated into believing that she is simply an astute problem solver, someone with street-smarts and institutional understandings, the structure of the office of financial aid becomes more meaningful for her than it might be for other students. The relationship between Meryem's habituated position in the field and the various structures on the college campus converge to either conserve or challenge a common doxa, namely that colleges reproduce, rather than alleviate, class inequalities.

Agency in the Field: Meryem's Habituated Identity

Meryem describes her experiences in education and their influence on her in vivid detail. She seems acutely aware of not only the way these events made her feel but also in that they have shaped the texture of her future. In this sense, Meryem seems to be uniquely conscious of

how habitus and doxa shape the likelihood of outcome and social mobility for students at the community college.

She appears to be someone who understands the value in the cultural capital associated with honors classes or the social capital associated with networking with your instructors. She is a first-generation learner from an underrepresented demographic, but she seems to have figured out the rules of the game, the doxa associated with successful performance in higher education. In this section, I isolate a few instances in which Meryem reflects on how structures like tracking and remediation have shaped her sense of self and experiences within the field of education.

It is important to remember that while Meryem describes these events and circumstances with unique clarity, they still had a marked impact on the way she views both herself and higher education in general. In this sense, one might argue that Meryem has been habituated into thinking according to a common doxa—that she is simply a hard-worker and not a good-student. This fixed but firm belief undergirds her approach to everything in her education, even if she tries to spin it as an asset rather than an obstacle.

Meryem’s position in high school. Throughout our discussions, Meryem consistently reminded me that she was not a member of the academic elite. She said that she “wasn’t a genius,” was “not like a smart kid,” and has had to “work harder... just so [she] could be with the normal crowd.” From a Bourdieuan stance, these identifications smack of habitus—the entrenched beliefs Meryem holds about herself, her aptitude and potential, and her position in the field. When I asked her where these thoughts originated, Meryem explained:

Um, all of my teachers—this is going off of what they said... I... I understand that I’m not like the smartest kid, and I’m okay with that. I wasn’t a genius, and I’m not like... a smart kid. But I’ve always been very strict with myself, with my morals, and with what I do. And I’ve always told myself that there’s one thing you can increase and change, and that is knowledge. And I believe that if you work hard enough, you can make yourself capable to keep up with people who might have had that talent of being really great

writers, or really great speakers, so I've worked harder, but just so I could be with the normal crowd, in a sense. And... all of my recommendation letters, written for me by my teachers, and they said that... all of them said that, "she has a blue-collar work-ethic." I also like spreading positivity, like looking for solutions and like, how to solve things, instead of being like, "I can't do it."

In this passage, Meryem identifies her position in the field of higher education, but she seems reluctant to provide a root cause. She drifts from describing an etiology instead, opting to focus on what she can do to manage the situations and circumstances she is provided. Her best guess is to simply keep trying. She celebrates grit, work-ethic, and resilience.

When Meryem makes the proclamation that there is "one thing you can increase and change, and that is knowledge," she is nearly echoing the words of Bourdieu (1986), who argued that knowledge, as an embodied form of social and cultural capital can be accrued through education, culture, or the arts. For Meryem, assimilating this type of capital means she'll have a better shot at social mobility, at adjusting her position in related fields of power. And because it seems as though Meryem believes that she hasn't inherited natural intelligence or "genius," she'll have to use those tools to match her classmates and remain competitive in related fields of power.

When Meryem says that she has had to "work harder" she might not be simply *identifying* this fact, she could also be *celebrating* it, so perhaps it is worth discussing the doxa of "hard-work," which Meryem seems to believe will secure her the capital she needs for greater social mobility. "Hard-work" is a romantic vision. One need not look further than the photographs of Lewis Hine, the films of Paul Schrader, or the music of Bruce Springsteen, all of whom captured—and capitalized on—the romance of blue-collar labor in America. From Bourdieu's perspective, this type of mythology functions as an ideological structure, supporting the common doxa of class inequality. Simply put, when Meryem romanticizes grit, work-ethic,

and blue-collar labor, she is supporting the doxa more than she is subverting, which makes her more likely to remain relegated to her position in the field.

Positioning remediation. Because Meryem is positioned according to her academic ability, she must find a way to reframe that position in order to avoid deficit orientation. While she has internalized her identity as an academic outsider, she is steadfast in maintaining her position as a “hard-worker.” Meryem maintains this distinction by reframing remediation as a choice, as something she has opted to do *because* of her work ethic. The following passage, from Meryem’s written narrative, highlights this decision.

When it came time to select classes my counselor suggested I took some remedial classes so I could improve my skills to college level, Because of me always having the need to improve and develop my skills on a daily basis I took the opportunity and applied for the remedial classes...I have Two remdal classes that i'm taking right now which are Reading in content areas RDG099 and Emerging Writers Workshop ENG 012. My experiences when it comes to my remedial classes have been a frustrating challenge and a rare opportunity. It is no surprise that a course that is made to help you improve your writing and reading abilities would be a little challenging but other than the challenge, the remedial courses are the most greet and easy understanding development course I have ever been apart of. Because of the courses I have learned many reading and writing skills and can slowly see myself moving further everyday. Even if you did well on your placement test I would suggest everyone to take theses courses because they really do help you improve to writing at a college level...

What stands out here first is the fact that Meryem relays this story as if her counselor simply “suggested” she take developmental courses. In fact, as of 2019 in the state of New York, colleges and universities are still legally eligible to *require* that students enroll in pre-freshman English courses such as the two Meryem describes here. The fact that she frames her enrollment in these classes as her taking “the opportunity and apply[ing] for remedial courses” is not so much a delusion but rather a strategy for resituating her position.

In my analysis, I do not imply that Meryem is lying, tweaking the truth, or trying to mislead me. Rather, it appears as though she is manipulating these experiences to serve in

support of her newly habituated identity as a “hard-worker.” If Meryem recognizes that enrolling in developmental coursework was her decision, it positions her in the field as someone with grit, initiative, work ethic, and a fire in her belly—all embodied forms of social or cultural capital. If she is positioned there by the admissions policies and departmental cut-off, however, all of that of that goes away.

This decision speaks to the ways in which Meryem has assimilated into the doxa and culture of higher education. She recognizes how various forms of capital might be exchanged for social mobility or better positions in related fields of power. Sorting structures like financial aid, admissions examinations, remediation policies all work to situate students like Meryem according to their position in the field.

Positioning from guidance counseling. As I spoke with Meryem, I couldn’t help but wonder where this firm but fixed belief that she was a bad student came from. Bourdieu theorized habitus as “the mutually penetrating realities of individual subjectivity and societal objectivity” (Swartz, 1997, p. 96). These penetrating realities shape the way we feel and the way we are perceived in society. We see something similar represented in Meryem’s descriptions of her experiences in school.

Meryem can trace the root cause of her lack of confidence back to her high school and her guidance counselor. After failing a social studies class, she was advised against enrolling in an AP art class. This, she describes, had a marked influence on her both in terms of how she views herself as a student as well as in how she treats administrative policies and institutional bureaucracies. She describes the impact of this event most clearly in the following passage:

I had trouble in my 9th grade. When I came to high school, I was like not the perfect student. I actually failed a social studies class, and because of that—ever since that occurrence—my guidance counselor always viewed me as, “Oh, is this going to be too much work for you?” So he created a bias against me, but after my 9th grade experience

he was way more responsive immediately. I like, I started going to extra-help all the time. I got my life together. So like, my senior year, when I was applying for... You know, I'm going to take AP classes for my senior year, you know? And he was like, "Are you sure that's good for you?" And I felt like the insecurity of me when I was in 9th grade and I just caved in, but I really regretted it, because I had an art class—and it was just an normal art class—in my senior year, and the teacher that was teaching my class was also the AP teacher, and I told her that I was going to apply but my guidance counselor talked me out of it, and she was so shocked, cause every time I'm in the class, I finish so much faster than any other student and I put a lot of effort into my drawings, and she was like "I wish I had you in my AP class," so that's basically why I had a horrible experience with that.

This event, which has had such a marked impact on Meryem's sense of self and perception of school, is rooted primarily in the tension between how Meryem viewed herself and her capabilities and how her counselor viewed her academic aptitude, but it also explains how she developed the skills to succeed when she was struggling. It sounds like "going to extra-help all the time" represents the first moment wherein Meryem began to understand the power of grit, but in that moment when her advisor dismissed her interest in AP art, Meryem began to *feel* like a struggling student.

In this moment, Meryem's high school guidance counselor served the function of a structure in the field. Since structures, according to Bourdieu, operate according to a common doxa, they ultimately serve to maintain or challenge the culture of related fields. In this example, student advising serves to maintain the standards associated with preserving the cultural and social capital associated with advanced placement coursework while simultaneously sorting Meryem into a different position in the field, accordingly.

While Meryem displays great maturity in her ability to move beyond the bad advice of one high school counselor, this interaction highlights the relationship between student experience, student identity, and administrative policies. It is probably true that this guidance counselor was following some sort of protocol, and even if it wasn't a formal protocol, his advice

could have been based on judgment informed by past practices. The intention, I assume, was to protect Meryem's GPA and theoretically, her sense of confidence, but what happened was Meryem transformed from a creative student interested in art and drawing and became the hard-worker she describes at length in our interviews.

In the next section I expand on this analysis and consider what happens when Meryem's new-found identity as "hard-worker" and savvy, expedient bureaucrat is called into question via obscure financial aid policies. While Meryem's position in the field is supported by the aforementioned embodied capital of her "street smarts" and "problem solving," what happens when this, like her academic ability, is called into question?

Connections. In these passages, Meryem offers a glimpse into the process of habituation. As her sense of self shifts away from the "good-student" and becomes "the hard-worker," she accommodates the changes to her position as they are orchestrated by structures in the related fields of higher education and education policy. Meryem's change in identification is inextricably linked to the habituating processes of structures like tracking, remediation, and academic admissions. In some ways, her ability to transform her circumstances into a palatable identity is unique and commendable, but with this new identity comes a new ideological doxa.

In the next section, Meryem's commitments to hard-work and grit risk costing her her livelihood at the community college. Because Meryem identifies more fully with her position as someone who can navigate the complexity of the community college's bureaucratic structures than she does as someone who performs well in her classes, when it becomes clear that she may have made a mistake concerning her financial aid, her integrity is called into question.

Interactions with Policy Structures

While Meryem believes that she has a fairly high policy literacy, most of her attention is dedicated to college cost and financial aid. Meryem is aware that enrolling in developmental coursework affects her financial aid status, but her ability to navigate the processes and protocols associated with the office of financial aid may be more limited than she realizes. These limitations impact not only her financial situation, but they also impact her sense of identity as a “hard-worker” or “problem-solver.” When it becomes clear that Meryem does not fully understand how her aid is distributed, she panics.

In this section, I trace Meryem’s interactions with financial aid as they interact with her experiences in developmental English coursework at SPCC. It is clear that Meryem recognizes that developmental coursework exhausts her funding and costs her time. She describes this herself when she considers how intersession classes might expedite her degree, but still she is confident in her ability to understand how financial aid works. In particular, she cites networking with her developmental writing instructor as a way of better understanding how her financial situation is impacted by developmental courses.

Meryem’s decision to consult her developmental writing instructor about financial aid is related to her position in the field. Since she lacks the social capital or network necessary for navigating this complex structure and field, she leans on what she is most confident in: her street-smarts, grit, and work-ethic. By consulting her instructors for advice, Meryem assumes she is navigating the system as well as anyone else, but problems emerge once it becomes clear that her instructors may not have the information she needs.

Early experiences with financial aid. Meryem relays that she has not inherited the privilege, wealth, or social capital that many students who attend four-year colleges enjoy. In this sense, she is somewhat naïve but always open to new information about college. In some ways

Meryem is a bit of a paradox. On the one hand she believes she has an innate ability to navigate complex structures and bureaucracies, but on the other she is always listening, always open to advice. This is most clear when Meryem explains how she first encountered financial aid.

Yeah, so originally, I heard financial aid from—obviously—my high school teachers. They would talk about it. They would tell us, “You know. You guys don’t have to pay for college. There is something called financial aid that can help you if you are financially needing aid from the government to go to college.” At first, I just brushed it off, because—you know, high school student, I could care less. Then, I realized when I started applying for colleges, I realized how much colleges were, and I was like “this is ridiculous,” and I went onto the college’s financial aid website, and I literally just winged it. I just did it. I didn’t have anybody by my side.

Like Meryem says, it is foolish to assume that high school seniors, especially high school seniors who would be the first in their family to go to college, are thinking realistically about college finance. It is to be expected that a student like Meryem might need help understanding the financial aid application process, but what stands out here is how she interprets her teacher’s description of financial aid.

Meryem says her teachers told her that “you guys don’t have to pay for college.” It is impossible to discern whether her teacher actually said this, or if this is how Meryem interpreted or remembered the exchange. Either way, this description of financial aid is wildly misleading. The overwhelming majority of students on financial aid are enrolled in federal loan programs. While this is, technically—as Meryem describes it—“aid from the government to go to college,” she has left out one important detail: that it would need to be repaid with interest.

The fact that Meryem describes financial aid in such idealistic terms hints that she may not understand college finance and administrative policies quite as well as she thinks she does. One cannot blame her for this, however. This type of policy literacy is an inherited privilege, a form of social and cultural capital passed down through networks and resources—networks and resources that have been withheld from Meryem. In general, it is reported that first-generation

college students have lower levels of financial literacy and often take on loans with worse terms than their counterparts with parents who graduated from college (Furquim, Glasener, et. al, 2017).

As a way to match this type of inherited privilege, Meryem has honed her networking skills. This started with listening to her high school teachers' advice on financial aid. But what happens if Meryem didn't misunderstand her teachers? What if they were simply wrong? After all, financial aid is notoriously confusing. In this sense, it is important to remember how financial aid, and its associated policies function as an organizing structure in the field of higher education. In theory, they are structured in order to grant greater access to a wider body of students, but in practice they may deter students with lower levels of policy literacy or familiarity with such structures. Meryem's strategies of networking and reaching out the people she thinks can help is simply what she sees as her best bet.

Seeking financial aid advice from developmental writing instructors. At the community college, Meryem has maintained her strategy of reaching out for help. She sees no shame in this strategy. In fact, she even seems to pride herself on developing and nurturing relationships with her instructors. Like all first-year community college students, Meryem is required to take a freshman seminar class, a class intended to introduce students to the culture of the college. In a certain sense, this class—a democratizing structure—functions to help students with less social and cultural capital match their classmates who may have inherited more. For example, Meryem describes that this class does discuss financial aid, but when I asked her about it, she was somewhat dismissive, reminding me that if she had any issues with financial aid, she simply asked her developmental writing instructors.

While such behavior may not at first seem inappropriate, and in fact may even be an informal part of the job description for developmental writing instructors, Meryem fails to recognize that her instructors may not have the requisite knowledge to provide helpful responses. In the following excerpt, Meryem describes how she gets advice from her developmental writing instructor, who she believes is a better source of information than her college seminar class:

Since I had the remedial classes, whenever I had questions about... like if I had to make a payment... or I need help with a subject; I don't know where to go, my remedial teachers would have all of this information, which is really great. Yeah, so I really didn't need the college seminar class, but if you didn't have any support like that. Like if you don't have a teacher that can give you the attention there other centers on the campus that can help you with your writing or your math, then yeah the college seminar class is really helpful, but I didn't need it...if I didn't know where to go to pay for my schedule, you know for next semester, and they [the developmental writing instructor] would tell me, "Oh, you go here, ask this person, and they'll instruct you further on." And that was great, but when it came to gaining advice, my remedial teachers were already helping us with making our schedules and like doing all that other stuff, which was taught in the college seminar class, but you know—first come serve.

In theory, this is a good idea. Meryem is using the skills she has honed, most notably her ability to navigate complex social and institutional landscapes by reaching out to community members and assembling a network to match the privilege inherited by her more well-off peers. This aspect of her identity, as it appears to have been habituated by structures in the field, is perhaps her greatest asset.

The problem arises when we consider that many developmental writing instructors do not have the requisite knowledge or experience to give informed advice. This issue is complicated by the related problem of adjuncts serving as developmental writing instructors. Since the majority of developmental writing instructors are, in fact, adjuncts, and since adjuncts teach at multiple locations and have less contact with administrative offices, they may be some of the least informed people on campus about such institutional logistics.

What happens here is that Meryem is confronted with the interrelated aspects of fields of power. The structures of remediation and staffing are influencing her experiences in the field of education, even if she is unaware of their inner-workings. When part-time instructors teach developmental writing, they are unable to distribute the institutional knowledge they might have had if they were full time faculty. This is no-one's fault, other than the policy architect. Meryem is simply using the assets that have gotten her this far, while her instructors are trying to help her to the best of their ability.

The best way Meryem sees to solve her problems about the complexity of college finance is to ask her remedial instructors, but the overwhelming majority of remedial English instructors are experts neither in remediation nor college policy. When it comes to questions concerning administrative offices and financial aid, one professor lamented, "I don't think that they are well-informed. It takes time for you to know the institution's policies about those things. It takes time for you to be informed it about that thing, right?"

Meryem is headed for a problem. She lacks the requisite resources to understand the complexities of college culture, and she has found a way to compensate for that—by reaching out to her instructors. At the same time, she has built her identity around being someone who can effectively navigate these complicated systems. This is, in and of itself, a tremendous success, but it is not difficult to imagine a situation wherein Meryem gets bad advice on financial aid practices, has to drop a class or is stuck with a bill and then suffers twice: once in terms of practical and financial means and again when her identity is shattered.

We can easily understand why it might be difficult, perhaps even embarrassing, for a first-generation learner or developmental student to reach out to their instructor for advice about college policies. *Habitus* gently dissuades us from reaching out for those olive-branches.

Meryem has reached out and held on with both hands, but she might be reaching out to the wrong people.

Anxiety and financial aid. It makes sense that Meryem would reach out for help. It is how she's managed navigating the complicated structures inherent in the field of higher education. Meryem clearly has a functional policy literacy, well beyond most of her peers and far beyond the average first-generation college student. She is aware of scholarships, the price-point difference between community college and four-year schools, as well as the impact of remediation on her long-term goals, including her plans to pursue a doctorate. She explains this when she discusses her decision to enroll at the community college. "Well, at first, I wasn't going to choose SPCC, because I was choosing to go to a four-year school, and I was receiving scholarships and things, like people were saying, "we'll give you scholarships."

While Meryem seems to understand that these four-year schools were going to give her "scholarships," I get the sense that she may not fully understand what scholarships are. It is easy to forget that Meryem has only been immersed in this material for a year at most. She is a freshman at the community college, but she speaks with confidence and knows enough jargon to make it through most of our conversation.

When I asked about policies concerning student aid, Meryem steered the interview toward her financial aid application. Meryem is proud of herself for working her way through her financial aid paperwork. She describes it here:

I went to financial aid before, and I already filled out the TAP and the normal paperwork.

Oh! Also, I did that all by myself. My parents did not help at all, and it's mostly

because... they have a hard time with English, so like filling out this form by myself for

the first time was actually really scary, cuz like every time you fill something out, it's like "If this is wrong, you'll be locked in jail!" and I'm like, "Okaayyyy"

In particular, I was struck by the practicality of Meryem's anxieties. She describes the fear of incarceration for inappropriately filling out her financial paperwork. This sort of anxiety is not unique, and in fact it plagues the working class.

Research supports that on average, families from modest economic backgrounds or minority racial and ethnic backgrounds are more skeptical of student loans, even if they are disproportionately represented amongst loan borrowers (Furquim, Glasener, Oster, McCall, & DesJardins, 2017). This means that more people with less money and from minority demographics take on loans, even though they are less literate in, and more uncomfortable with, the process of loan lending in the first place. And who could blame them? With the rising cost of tuition, paying for college out of pocket has become all but impossible.

In the quote above, Meryem captures the essence of her anxiety as it is situated amongst the structures in the field of higher education. Here, it is easy to see how the fear of legal action might dissuade a student from enrolling in college in the first place. Thus, it becomes clear how structures like financial aid and remediation work to perpetuate the doxa of higher education, reproducing rather than alleviating class inequalities.

Loan lending malpractice has a long and storied history in the United States of America; from red-lining real estate practices to predatory interest rates, underrepresented people have cause for concern, but what ensues is a sort of Kafka-esque phobia of bureaucracy. Perhaps this is why throughout our interview, Meryem reminds me on four separate occasions that she did all of this paperwork on her own, but when I ask her what exactly she applied for, loans, grants or some other award, her mood changes, and it dawns on her:

Basically, I knew that if you applied for financial aid, the government would give you money to pay for college. It sounded really good when they explained it, but know that I think of it, I'm like 'Wait, where is that money coming from?'"

Meryem seemed to quickly recognize that she is unaware of the conditions of her financial aid awards. If they are loans, they will need to be repaid—with interest. If they are grants, there may be other stipulations, such as grade point minimum, or volunteer service hours. It is obvious that all of this is rushing through Meryem's head.

I sensed her mood turning and returned to celebrating how she did this all on her own. After all, this is no small feat. Despite its significance and equitable stance,

many eligible students do not complete the FAFSA, particularly low-income students, who are typically FG students (King 2004). By failing to complete the FAFSA, individuals face higher college costs by forgoing potentially significant amounts of financial aid (King 2004; Kofoed 2017), or they fail to enroll in college altogether (Bettinger et al. 2012). (Furquim, Glasener, Oster, McCall, & DesJardins, 2017, p72).

This puts Meryem in a minority of low-income students who complete their FAFSA application and make into a freshman writing class, but Meryem faces compounding issues once she actually enrolls at the college.

With her sense of identity hinging on her ability to successfully navigate structures like financial aid, the possibility of accruing mounting student loan debt is only part of the problem. What's worse, potentially, is that if Meryem had this wrong, if asking her developmental instructors and high school teachers for advice actually put her on the *wrong* track, her livelihood is called into question.

Connections. So far, Meryem has successfully navigated her way through the bureaucracies of the interrelated structures of remediation and financial aid by reaching out to her instructors. While she has some anxiety concerning college cost and financial aid, her faith in both her instructors and her ability to solve complex problems gives her comfort and helps her focus on her academic work.

It goes without saying that college cost and financial aid policies are having an impact on Meryem's experience at the community college. The same could be said of any student. But for Meryem, who is enrolled in multiple developmental courses, and who prides herself on her abilities to navigate these structures, the impacts are more severe.

On the one hand, these realities have a palpable impact on Meryem's financial portrait. Her developmental courses delay her graduation, which delays her earning potential. Meryem even meditates on this herself when she balances the decision between making up lost time with winter classes versus using that time to secure a job and her driver's license. On the other, Meryem is only aware that these policies and practices are having an impact on her. She doesn't really know who to ask or how to resolve the conflicts.

Meryem's case is interesting, because aspects of her interview seem so clearly to articulate Bourdieu's vision of habitus, field and capital. In the first portion of her case, I explored how Meryem processes her identity in relation to structures like remediation and academic tracking. She is able to recover bits of her identity and position herself in the field of education, not as someone with intrinsic academic ability, but instead as someone who can work hard-enough to make up for those perceived deficits. Then I investigated how that position interacts with structures like financial aid and college remediation, both of which challenge her perceptions of self and problematize her ultimate path toward earning her doctorate.

When I reflect on this interview, I have a sinking feeling in my gut. Meryem is proud of herself for successfully navigating the office of financial aid on her own, and she should be. This seems to tap into the type of intelligence with which she most clearly identifies: a practical, procedural, “no-nonsense” type of intelligence. She views herself as the type of person who can get things done. But still, the fact remains that first-generation students, on average, tend to apply for more financial aid and larger loans with more predatory lending conditions than students with a family history in higher education (Furquim, Glasener, Oster, McCall, & DesJardins, 2017). In one notorious case, Corinthians College, a private-for-profit college founded in 1995, recruited low-income and homeless students, attracting them with falsified statements concerning job placement rates and helped them apply for predatory loans. (Furquim, Glasener, Oster, McCall, & DesJardins, 2017).

As I listened to Meryem, these facts, statistics, and horror stories, rattle around my head. I scribble down notes: *Research loan lending and first-generation students. Corinthians College. Average default rate for community college students?* I also remembered my own experiences. How did I apply for financial aid? My parents must have helped me, but what did they know? So perhaps it is important to revisit why, exactly, she did this on her own. As she describes, English is not her parents’ first language, but it is important to remember that the legal rhetoric of college administrative offices is difficult even for native speakers. Meryem is more literate in processes and protocol for college finance than many of her peers, but she runs into a problem when she gets that information from her remedial instructors, whom she trusts. This is not to say that her developmental English professors are malicious or even irresponsible. They simply don’t know as much as they think they do. If you need any proof of this unique brand of American legal-illiteracy, consider the micro-economy of tax preparation. People struggle.

Meryem's case represents how agents in the field are positioned according both to how one's habitus influences perceptions about one's self, the world around them, and their own aptitude and capabilities as well as how structures in the field present practical obstacles aimed at reproducing the doxa of a field. In this case, the relational sociology of Pierre Bourdieu is clearly evident. In the next case, I present similar issues in Patrick, a veteran student who has complimentary interactions with the Veterans Affairs Resource Center.

Case Study: Patrick

"The VA took the wheel on this. I don't know what they did, but it's been fast and quick."

In the quote above Patrick, a military veteran and community college student, explained to me how the Veterans Affairs Resource Center impacted his experience at the community college. For Patrick, who admitted to never feeling fully comfortable in a college classroom or on a college campus, the "VA," as he calls it, has been an invaluable resource. Throughout our interview, he consistently celebrated the work of the VA, as they managed his financial aid and helped him through enrollment and admissions.

This type of assistance is important for Patrick, because like Joey, Patrick has struggled his way through school, all while maintaining a general sense of disinterest in academic pursuit. And like Meryem, Patrick is the first in his family to go to college—except for one older sibling—so the culture, processes, and practices of higher education were still largely unfamiliar. For all three students, college was an alien and unfamiliar place, full of complex and confusing bureaucracies and protocol.

What is so interesting about Patrick's case is that while he shares the aforementioned similarities with Joey and Meryem, he is the only one of my three profiled cases to truly internalize his identity as a developmental student. Throughout our interviews, and in his written

narrative, Patrick calls remediation a “great fit,” something he is “happy about,” and something that he “needs.” While some of this may be true—it is not my role to evaluate Patrick’s writing ability—I cannot help but think of how Bourdieu’s philosophies are on display here. When Patrick offers some of his history, I learn that he believes that “college was never really an option,” that both of his parents work in corrections, that his mother was a United States Marine, and that he felt pre-determined to follow in the footsteps of military service and then law enforcement.

From a Bourdieuan stance it became apparent that the social and cultural capital associated with college was not necessarily encouraged in Patrick’s educational, home, or military life. Instead, it appeared, military service and work in law enforcement or corrections represented the common doxa. It goes without saying that such career paths are not necessarily opposite those that encourage college, but for Patrick, he felt like he needed to make a choice.

His decision to go to college came on shaky legs. When I first spoke to Patrick, he was clearly nervous about returning to school. At the same time, he was deeply grateful. In particular, he was grateful for the VA, which he maintains has been critical in managing his status as a student at the college. While such support services are clearly well-intended, I was disconcerted by one detail: that Patrick placed into *both* developmental math and developmental English *without* a placement or assessment exam. Patrick maintains that he is grateful for the extra courses, for the chance to catch up, but it is worth noting that when I asked how he was placed into these courses, he did not have a definitive answer.

In the case that follows, I introduce Patrick as a student who seems to have deeply internalized the fixed and firm beliefs habituated by structures like the family, the military, and law enforcement and corrections. In the first section, I explore how Patrick appears to be

habituated according to these various structures in his life. He struggled through high school, so he came into the college already feeling like an outsider. Coming from the military and a family with careers in law enforcement may have made him feel even more outside of the mainstream.

In the second section, I explore how these processes of habituation seem to affect Patrick's experiences with policies at the community college. In particular, I focus on how remediation, the VA, and financial aid interact and influence Patrick's academic and financial standing. For example, since Patrick is eligible for public subsidies provided by the GI Bill, his developmental coursework is fully funded, but those funds come from a larger pool of subsidies, one which can be prematurely exhausted. Without an explanation as to why he is enrolled in these classes, he may be pointlessly exhausting aid awards, which could result in a lack of available funding at the end of his degree.

Like Joey and Meryem, Patrick is an academic outsider—someone who doesn't feel as though he fits in on campus. Because of this he reaches out to, and puts his faith in, the VA Resource Center. Like Meryem who asked her developmental writing instructors for financial aid advice, Patrick assumes he is doing the right thing, but in this case I explore how a habituated identity, one influenced by the structures of related fields of power, may be influencing Patrick to avoid conflict with the VA when he might have otherwise investigated the reason behind his academic placement.

Agency in the Field: Patrick's Habituated Identity

Like both Joey and Meryem, Patrick recognizes the practical payoff of attending college. In this sense, he thinks of higher education in terms of its symbolic capital, but unlike Joey, Patrick has internalized how the structures undergirding the field of higher education sort and position him, and unlike Meryem he has not adopted an alternative identity position to help him

assert agency over his position in the field. Whereas both of the previously profiled cases represent an agent pushing back against the structure, fighting to maintain some sense of autonomy, Patrick seems all but ready to give up his autonomy, quickly and readily playing into the roles prescribed for him by structuring and habituating administrative offices.

In this section, I explore how ideological structures like primary school, family life, military service, and law-enforcement and corrections all work to inoculate a sense of habitus in Patrick. In particular, I focus on how these aspects of Patrick's upbringing and experience overlap and interrelate in meaningful ways, all of which culminates into the common doxa Patrick describes when he argues, "I was supposed to do law enforcement... I didn't think college would be any viable option or anything like that."

Positioning experiences from early education. Patrick graduated from high school in 2009. He attended night classes after he was "kicked out of day school" at his district high school, where he says he "got mixed with the wrong people." He graduated, to the surprise of his teachers, his parents, and even himself. Patrick describes his early educational experiences here:

I got mixed with the wrong people, um you know. I got kicked out of day school, and I pretty much went to night school. And I don't know how I managed to get a diploma, because I shouldn't have gotten a diploma, but I ended up doing that, um a lot of the people, you know teachers, my parents really thought I was going to amount to nothing, so that's what ultimately made me go to the military, but I guess with the discipline and all that other stuff it really changed my mindset, I'm not the person I used to be. I have more appreciation for stuff now.

This passage offers some insight into why Patrick feels the way he does about school. First, it stands out that Patrick, like Joey, seems to conflate "school" and the "diploma." This one-to-one correlation all but transforms education into a form of symbolic capital, and Patrick seems to covet such forms of symbolic capital. At the same time, there is a determinism to Patrick's language here. He "managed" to earn his diploma. He "ended up" graduating from high school.

And he was “ultimately made” to join the military. From a Bourdieuan stance, it is easy to see how Patrick rarely felt as though he had any agency over his position in fields of power, especially in those related to education.

In the passage above, Patrick offers how neither he, his parents, nor his teachers believed that he would persist and graduate with a high school diploma. Patrick seems to have internalized these beliefs and treats things like school, work, and military service as structuring structures, all of which aim toward prescribing and positioning agents like Patrick. When Patrick acts in accordance with these beliefs and expectations, they begin to limit or impact his likelihood for success in the future. This is what makes enrolling in college such a leap. It seems to challenge all of the prescriptions outlined for Patrick.

Patrick seems to have had trouble acclimating to the culture of school and in understanding how schools function on an institutional level. He appears to always have had a literacy gap in educational policy. He says that he does not know how he managed to get his diploma, and I do not believe that this is a turn of phrase. In reality, I think he is unsure of whether or not he satisfied the core requirements to earn his college diploma.

Positioning experiences at the community college. Despite what he describes as overwhelming odds, Patrick is enrolled in college. But now that he seems to be struggling with two distinct, but interrelated, questions: How does he identify himself within the field of higher education, and how does he identify college itself? More simply, how does the position of college student fold into his identity and situate him in related fields of power? And what does college mean to him? These questions are complicated by the structure of a pre-freshman writing course, as such courses exist in academic limbo. Since they are administered at the college, but

do not count for credit points, they are simultaneously college courses and not-college-courses.

When I asked him about his experiences in the developmental writing course, he responded:

I had a good time in there. It wasn't hard. I know that a lot of the other kids were struggling, but I mean I don't think they cared too much for it. You know, they still had the high school mindset. But yeah, me going there? I pretty much focused and I pretty much learned different techniques, you know how to structure the essays and everything. You know, I learned a lot. It's like stuff that I went over, way back in the day, but it's not like I knew how to do it now, so it's a refresher, and it really helped me out.

Patrick describes the developmental course as a "refresher" and as place to practice techniques he learned "way back in the day." Honing these skills leads to more embodied cultural capital. While he supports the class and its potential, he differentiates himself from his classmates with the "high school mentality." What arises is a question about how similar the community college developmental writing classroom is to high school.

In a certain sense, Patrick views remediation similarly to Meryem. It is a place for Patrick to match the inherited privilege or natural talent of students who place directly into freshman level English. And thus, he is adamant in defending the integrity of his formal college education, adamant about preserving the symbolic capital associated with his studies. He respects the community college as an institute of higher learning, lamenting what he perceives to be irresponsibility amongst many of his younger peers. When he reflects on his developmental writing course, he remembers that his instructor "gave [them] all the tools and all the things that are necessary to learn how to do it. You just need to take the initiative to take the tools and apply yourself, and not too many of those kids apply themselves."

Dismissing the “high school mentality” of his peers means preserving the symbolic capital of the institution. This is important, because without that capital intact, the embodied capital Patrick accrues—that which he hopes to exchange later in life for a better position in related fields of power—becomes useless. While Patrick describes himself as “never really into school,” “a knucklehead,” and someone who got “never really cared for” formal education, he stops short of dismissing formal education and academic training entirely. His belief in the intrinsic value of formal education led him back to school, even if it didn’t seem like it was a “viable option.”

As of today, however, Patrick is serious about continuing his education *beyond* the community college, which implies that his experiences at SPCC, thus far, have been positive. He has bought into the idea that the college will provide him with the necessary resources to pursue gainful employment in a field he is passionate about. He says:

Right now, I’m hearing what the second-year RTV students are doing, you know whether... You know they’re saying, “Oh, this is a good school for film production.” Stuff like that, so... Um, whatever I hear that’s good that’s going amongst the classmates. That’s kind of how I’m taking it, you know doing my research on. But I don’t know where I want to go, like school-wise after this. So, it’s just like, I’m still doing my research, but I do want to get my associate’s from [SPCC], then go to a different art/television production school.

Here, Patrick addresses the new position he occupies in the field of higher education. Now as an RTV student, he has a new network and a new doxa. If nothing else, Patrick is making good use of the social networks he develops at the community college and in the RTV program. This

network of future professionals is granting him access to and a deeper understanding of the field of television production.

Because Patrick has experienced success thus far, I am led to believe that he is aware of the institutional conversation surrounding the field of higher education and the structure community college. He seems to intuit some of the internal tensions of public two-year colleges. Are they sites for occupational training or institutes of higher learning? Do they give people a leg-up or could they hold them down? Is the learning practical or academic? While he does not explicitly make these arguments, some of his questions, concerns and observations highlight the relationship between these administrative questions and student experience.

Positioning experiences from family. Upon graduating from high school, Patrick followed in the footsteps of his mother, a former U.S. Marine, and enlisted in the military, where he served as military police and worked in a jail. Military service and law-enforcement appears to be a common doxa in Patrick's family. Both his parents are veterans, and his brother is a member of the NYPD. He describes his family in the following passage:

...My mom—she was a Marine, and she didn't go to college either. My dad, he didn't go to college. My brother, he was the only one to go to college. But, I kind of followed in my mom's footsteps in, like, going into the military. Um, my dad went into Law Enforcement, right after—I guess—high school. He met my mom in Riker's Island. So they both were corrections officers, so that's pretty much the educational background. I was, uh, supposed to do law enforcement, but you know—I did law enforcement in the military, and I didn't really like it. So, I felt like it wasn't what I wanted to do. Like, I don't know how my parents did 20 years working in the prison, but... you know I kind of felt like I was a prisoner working in jail, so that's definitely something I didn't want to do as a career.

When Patrick says that he was “supposed to do law enforcement,” I understand that he possesses a certain life-script, what constructivist psychologists would call a “schema,” the seemingly inevitable route, plan, or direction for your life, but Bourdieu would call this habitus. Military

service and law-enforcement function as a type of social capital in Patrick's family. By offering that he was "supposed to do law enforcement," I can't help but hear his parents in his ear.

When Bourdieu described how structure and habitus function amongst the field, he understood that they work to either support or challenge common doxa. After listening to Patrick, I begin to wonder how he might have been conditioned to behave in certain ways. School makes him feel like a "knucklehead," while his parents make him feel as though "college was never really an option." Without psychoanalyzing him, we might logically deduce that coming from a family of military veterans and members of law enforcement normalized similar life trajectories, while dismissing his academic future. The fact that Patrick ever even made it to college is somewhat of an anomaly. It certainly challenged the doxa he grew up with.

Neither of Patrick's parents attended college, so Patrick never saw college in his future. When he talks about his life, it all sounds quite deterministic, as if he had been following a script. His decision to enroll in college came only after leaving the military, which he says changed him for the better. Before the military, Patrick "didn't think college would be any viable option," but he always had a creative streak even if it was never fully actualized. Patrick is infatuated by film, the technology, and the artistry. He recalls:

I always had a thing for taking videos and stuff like that, so I wanted to do the video aspect. I don't have anything to do with photography. I don't really like taking pictures as much, but if there's like a video... I always liked, when I listen to music, I always thought about how I would direct the music video.

Patrick's penchant for video comes as something of a surprise. In fact, it took two interviews and nearly two hours of conversation before he addressed this dream of directing music videos.

When Patrick says he "always had a thing for taking videos," I can't quite tell if he means he had

an interest or he had a talent, but Patrick isn't the type of person to gloat over his talents. Either way, he recognizes this element as a part of his identity, though he may have had trouble integrating it into his professional and daily life.

This appears to be because, unlike his career in the military, or his experiences working in a correctional facility, this aspect of his identity was not outwardly endorsed by the people or structures around him. Patrick indicates that in some ways he was habituated into a career in the military. This is not to say that it wasn't his choice, but it certainly appears as though this would have been the path of least resistance. He articulates this himself when he says that he "followed in [his] mom's footsteps."

From these statements, I began to consider how Patrick viewed himself as positioned in the field of education. He felt like an outsider, lacking the requisite skills and knowledge to perform well at the college level. All of this, as embodied social and cultural capital, could be gained at the community college, but Patrick felt as though it was beyond his reach.

Patrick seems to credit his brother with blazing the trail to college. His older brother, a police officer, is also a professional photographer. When I ask him about college and his family, Patrick says:

...the thing that brought me to the school was my brother—and now he has his own side-business, working as a free-lance photographer. And he does like a lot of weddings and everything, so ever since like that whole situation... [it's]...sort of the reason I started researching the film production stuff, and I heard that [SPCC] had a really good program, and that's the reason I took that route.

When Patrick's brother developed an interest in photography, he created an environment within which Patrick was able to express his own interests in creative endeavor. This is emblematic of

Bourdieu's habitus, which posits that external structures make us feel and behave in ways consistent with societal values.

Similarly, with Patrick's brother's interest in professional photography there came a new doxa. His success, however, transformed into the social and cultural capital necessary for social mobility and success in the professional field. College, and the pursuit of a career in television production may have felt beyond Patrick's experience and outside of his options, but it suddenly made sense. Even if Patrick felt uncomfortable enrolling, there was now a clear and logical purpose for going.

Connections. In this section, I introduced Patrick and explored how his experiences at the community college paired with the common doxa he grew up with seem to impact his sense of position in the field of higher education. Patrick's experiences in primary school, at home, and in the military have all served to structure his perception of himself and his potential. While the community college has begun to restructure some of his perceptions about his position in related fields of power, Patrick still feels something like an outsider.

Despite this feeling of being an outsider, Patrick appears open to restructuring his position in the field. He was open to it when his brother opened the door to creative arts and production, and he seems to be open to it at SPCC, as he excitedly discussed the prospect of four-year, and perhaps even graduate, school. Despite being clearly habituated into believing that he had a career in either the military, law enforcement, or corrections, his brother blazed a trail for him, by normalizing professional interests in creative arts and production.

In terms of academics, as a developmental student, Patrick is grateful for the opportunity to reclaim some of the embodied capital that previously escaped him, and he is quick to assume ownership over this identity position. As a community college student, Patrick is adamant in his

defense of the value and integrity of community college, but he also understands the value in transferring to a four-year program.

Despite enrolling at the community college and describing excitement for his courses, Patrick does not identify as an “academic.” He is resolute in his disinterest in traditional schooling, but he also recognizes the community college as something other than a vocational training institute. He continually calls it “the college” and sounds frustrated when he discusses his classmates’ “high school mentality.” Perhaps Patrick identifies the community college more clearly than most of us can—as something existing in the liminal space, and constant tensions, between vocational training, high-school, and the four-year college

In the next section, I explore how some of these internal structures within the field of higher education pose problems for Patrick. Specifically, it becomes clear that Patrick is unaware of how, exactly, he placed into his developmental courses, as he does not recall taking any placement exam. Similarly, Patrick is only partially aware of how remediation influences his awards and funding through the VA Resource Center. Because of Patrick’s professional history in the military and corrections, family history, and his own academic history, Patrick is less likely to rock the boat and ask questions about his placement or funding. At the same time, his reverence and appreciation for the VA Resource Center positions him in such a way that he is uncomfortable asking deeper questions.

Interactions with Policy Structures

Community colleges are widely celebrated for their accessibility and unique ability to enroll students from diverse backgrounds. In fact, diversity is often cited as the chief strength and defining characteristic of community colleges across the country. While community colleges traditionally enroll students from diverse social, economic, racial, and religious backgrounds,

they also enroll nearly half of all military and veteran students. As of 2008, military and veteran students made up about 4% of all enrolled college students, and of that percentage 43% opted to attend public two-year colleges (American Council on Education, 2009).

It could be argued that veteran students have more contact with administrative offices than their civilian counterparts. Given that their education is financed through the GI Bill, they must triangulate communication between three offices: the VA, financial aid, and registrar—one more than the typical community college student. In the following section, I discuss how Patrick, a 29-year-old military veteran and Radio and Television Production major at SPCC, navigates the positioning structures of remediation, admissions, and the VA.

Patrick is clearly grateful for the VA Resource center, which he describes as aiding him in managing these various administrative offices on campus. This gratitude and indebtedness are best summarized here.

When I went to the VA resource center, they took care of me, and it was pretty much like I was on auto-pilot. They took the wheel, and they guided me in the right direction. But I have to say, if I was not military, and I was doing this on my own.... The VA took the wheel on this. I don't know what they did, but it's been fast and quick. Whatever paperwork they needed... So yeah, pretty much that was just it.

In this passage, Patrick shows me two things: first that he is grateful for the VA resource center. This is clear when says that they “took care” of him and allowed him to be on “auto-pilot.” Second, it is also clear that Patrick is not sure what, exactly, the VA did, or is doing. He cannot imagine how he might proceed through this process “if [he] was not in the military, and [he] was doing this on [his] own...”

From a Bourdieuan stance, Patrick's perception of his inability to navigate admissions and enrollment without help from the VA Resource Center, represents the effects of habitus on his attitudes about his potential. Given Patrick's history in education, and family's common doxa, it is worth noting that it would be difficult for him to reach out to anyone else other than the VA for help. This creates an inextricable link between Patrick and the structure of the VA, which solidifies his position in related fields of power. Simply put, Patrick seems to feel as though he cannot succeed in college without the VA, even if he isn't exactly sure of what they're doing.

It is my belief that such sentiment has deep implications in the study of higher education, because without an understanding of his aid and awards, he may be exhausting them prematurely, which raises the critical question: What happens when students enrolled in community college have only a basic understanding of how their aid and awards are implemented and applied?

This kind of critical inquiry is not without precedent. Following World War II, Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944—the GI Bill—into law. The GI Bill provided public subsidies for military veterans to attend college, but there was no federal oversight into how these subsidies were received, so many veterans looking for an introduction to college or career training fell victim to entrepreneurial start-ups who offered technical or vocational training without accreditation. This ate up the veterans' award subsidies. It was a lack of institutional literacy that cost so many veterans their awards and left them without the professional credentials they sought (Skocpol, 1996).

When Patrick says that the VA Resource center “took the wheel” and that he “was on auto-pilot,” he indicates that he has little understanding of the inner-workings or procedures of

administrative offices on campus. Most community college students do not understand credits, commensuration-policies, or financial aid. What makes Patrick's story interesting is that he is enrolled in developmental writing at SPCC, though he is not sure why. When I asked him about a placement exam, he assumes the VA resource center was behind this, though he is not sure why. His case represents an important phenomenon: It could be argued that when veteran students have their affairs handled by administrative offices, they lose autonomy and understanding of their status at the community college which puts them at higher risk of being exploited.

In this section I further examine how administrative offices and—in this case—student support services complicate the already crowded and confusing fields of power. For Patrick, the VA is clearly a resource, but at the same time he is largely left out of the discussion concerning his own educational experiences.

Policy literacy. Patrick, like most people, and nearly all remedial community college students, understands enough about higher education to get by, or at least enough to register for classes, pay tuition, and take a seat in a college classroom. With the help of the VA, he can navigate the field, even if it isn't easy.

When we attend college, we think about our academics, algebra, literature, biology, etc. But part of succeeding in the public two-year college is about understanding how colleges, specifically community colleges, work. Frameworks like the Guided Pathways Program pioneered by the Community College Research Center at Teachers College attempt to resolve these issues. The Guided Pathways framework places emphasis not only on academic preparation but also on institutional literacy, providing students new to this landscape a map,

tools, and advice on how to graduate or transfer from the community college (Bailey, Smith Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2016).

This type of knowledge is embodied cultural capital. It takes form as policy literacy (Lo Bianco, 2001), or the skills and abilities to navigate the policies of the community college, some of which are so vapid and banal that it is difficult to maintain focus on them. For instance, when I asked Patrick about the assessment policies for his developmental writing course, he replied with a hazy response:

Um, it's graded like—more or less. I kind of have a sense of it. It's not an actual grade-grade. We're not getting actual credit for it, but it's a pass or fail grade. You know, if we get all the material in correctly and we hand things in on time and applied ourselves, the whole thing is a pass or fail. I handed everything in on time. I did everything that I needed to do. Hopefully I pass.

Here, Patrick implies that he understands the general gist of the grading policies for his developmental writing class. He understands the language: “we’re not getting actual credit for it,” and I really appreciated his simplification of the policy when he says, “It’s not an actual grade-grade.” Overwhelmingly, Patrick is simply concerned with passing this class, so that he can access the institutionalized capital of an associate’s degree or transferring into a baccalaureate program. For Patrick, the content of developmental writing is not really the point. Its purpose is manifested into symbolic capital in the sense that he needs to gain entry into credit-bearing coursework.

Patrick’s meditations here remind me of my time at the community college, when I only vaguely understood that I needed 60-something credits to graduate. First, I thought that meant 60 classes. I did the math as quick as I could: four classes a semester, two semesters a year... *This*

was going to take me almost eight years? Why do they call it a two-year college? I was too embarrassed to ask, secretly afraid I'd done the multiplication wrong. I took the brochure home and studied it again, this time more slowly.

Today, I understand that most classes are 3 credits, and you can manage 15 credits a semester pretty easily if you take a film or pottery class. Evening classes are almost always easier. You can get away with more in classes taught by adjuncts, but this is insider information. None of this is in the brochure. Admissions counselors won't tell you that you can argue with your poetry instructor about interpreting *Paradise Lost*, that you can contest your grade, and that if you have the confidence to bring it to the department chair, most instructors will simply change the grade. Most underrepresented freshmen don't know that it isn't worth the instructor's time or energy to fight with students over grades, and most developmental students don't have the confidence to do so in the first place.

These types of literacies, as forms of embodied social or cultural capital represent a student's ability to successfully navigate the complexities of the community college landscape, but perhaps it is best to simply call them *policy literacies*. For Patrick, college happened very quickly, and he had to learn his academic material as well as relearn how to be a student. It's no wonder then why when the VA Resource Center swooped in, he was "surprised [by] how quickly the whole process was and how informative they [the VA office] continue to be."

Patrick's placement exam. Even at the end of the study and the end of Patrick's course it remains unclear what, exactly, qualified Patrick for his developmental coursework—both in Math and English. He simply says his placement exam was "waived," but Patrick appears quick to assume fault, describing himself as "a horrible writer... [who] need[s] communication skills a lot more." He describes Math and English as "some of the worst subjects [he had]," which he

“never really cared for,” blaming himself for placing into the developmental courses, even though there was no evidence to support this. I started to understand that Patrick may have internalized these beliefs about himself, but it was also becoming clear that he didn’t understand the policies that placed him in the classes that made him feel so badly about himself.

When I asked Patrick about his placement test, he relayed that other administrative offices were just as confused. His descriptions of the offices of the registrar and academic advising are particularly telling.

The placement test... they [registrar and academic advising] were kind of a little uh...

you know... kind of weirded by it. Like, “um why didn’t you take a placement exam?”

Cuz, I asked them, “Am I gonna take a placement exam?” and they’re like “You haven’t taken one yet? Cuz it looks like in the system you did,” and I was like “hmmm.”

Patrick raises important questions here. He knew to ask about the exam, but he is surprised and confused when he asks his advisor about it, because they assumed that he’d already taken the exam. Patrick is left with a decision: Does he confront the VA, who have been helping him so much, and inquire as to why he was never given an exam? Or, does he accept his developmental courses?

Patrick did not protest the fact that the “system” says that he took the exam. This seems to imply that while Patrick has challenged the common doxa keeping him away from college, he is still habituated into behaving in ways consistent with an “outsider” in the field. Without the requisite skills and knowledge to navigate this situation, his only asset is the VA Resource Center, which he seems reluctant to question. When he “hmmm’s” to himself, I almost wonder if he begins to question whether or not he took the exam—even though he said to me, “I know for sure that I never took the exam.”

When Patrick assumes fault, I sense that this is the result of his habituated identity position—where he sees himself situated in the field of higher education. Because of his past experiences, feelings, and attitudes about education, his own perceived ineptitudes seem to be the most likely reason for his remediation. At the same time, Patrick’s inability to navigate the complexities of these administrative offices speaks to his lack of embodied social capital, which obfuscates his path and deepens his reliance on structures like the VA Resource center.

Military Waiver. Patrick worked through several plausible reasons as to why or how he was placed into college remediation without a placement exam. First, he assumed that the exam was waived by the VA Resource Center. When I asked him about this, he said:

Um, pretty much—I guess they did something. They [the office of admissions] looked at it, and they said it’s probably waived by the military. And I felt pretty happy about that. I was like “Oh, awesome, I don’t have to take a test.”

Patrick’s language around higher education policy and practice is always hazy. He *guesses* that they did *something*, though he is unsure of what something might be. Like Meryem who understood what financial aid was but not the specific differences between loan awards and grant awards, Patrick understands enough about his status as a student at the college to worry about his placement exam, but he does not possess enough policy literacy or confidence to debate or inquire further.

In particular, the fact that he defers to the VA Resource Center says something about how he feels on campus. Bourdieu argued that habitus is a “structuring structure” that works to influence perception or positions. Here, Patrick seems to be influenced, or habituated, by the military and the VA Resource Center in the field of higher education. His gratitude for the

funding opportunities granted from the GI Bill might make him uncomfortable protesting, or even questioning, his academic placement.

High school transcripts. Patrick had another guess. If it wasn't the VA Resource Center who'd recommended his placement into developmental coursework, it could have been his high school. In the following passage, Patrick meditates on his high school performance.

Um, I'm guessing it was my high school transcript. I was really bad in school. I didn't take it seriously. I was pretty immature, and you know I wasn't really you know like. I didn't ever think that school would be for me. I didn't think college would be any viable option or anything like that.

What's most interesting here is that schools and military service might be two of the most influential structures according to Bourdieu's Field Theory. Both have enormous influence over Patrick's sense of identity and his perspective on his position in the field of higher education.

This suspicion of his high school transcripts makes good enough sense. There is plenty of research to support his argument. Sociologists who recognize the trend of "downward coupling" in American high schools understand that many students are underprepared for the leap between high school and college, not because of their own lack of intelligence or drive, but rather because American education prioritizes the transition between elementary, middle, and high school over the transition between high school and college (Clark, 1986) (Shaughnessy, 1977).

Still, I get the sense that Patrick is blaming himself *as a high school student* and not the structure of the American high school curriculum. In truth, if this is the reason for his placement, fault may really lie in the relationship between Patrick the high school student and the American high school curriculum.

While Patrick talked through these plausible reasons for his remediation, I recalled the writing he completed for me. It was *fine*, nothing extraordinary, but clearly communicated albeit somewhat awkward. In the passage below, Patrick writes about his experience with the VA:

Going through the VA Resource Center, the experience was amazing. Emily and the Resource team were very professional, competent, and selfless. They all made it their mission to handle each and every veteran with the care we all deserve. I personal was surprised how quickly the whole process was and how informative they continue to be to us. We all get weekly updates about veteran affairs and constant reminders on the importance of keeping on track with school to maintain our educational benefits.

From this sample, I can only infer as to why Patrick is so willing to accept the seemingly baseless recommendation to enroll in remedial courses. To me, it seems fine. Really, it would have been inappropriate for me to persuade Patrick either way. I only knew what he told me, after all. So perhaps it makes more sense to focus on the fact that no one, neither he nor the admissions counselor with whom he spoke, seems to understand exactly how his tests were waived and he wound up in these classes in the first place.

At this point, I immediately recalled the work of Glynda Hull, Mike Rose, Kay Losey Fraser, and Marisa Castellano (1991), who recognized the social construction of remedial writers. In their study of writing evaluation and portfolio review, identical papers were tagged as either remedial or standard freshman composition. The papers were intentionally written to avoid the traditional structure of the much bemoaned “five-paragraph essay.” The papers meandered through perspectives and contexts, never settling on a definitive claim or argument. The point was to see if the label affected the reader’s opinion, and thus categorizing, of the writing. It did. The papers tagged as standard freshman composition were celebrated for their ingenuity and

their resistance to genre norms. But the same papers, once they were tagged as remedial, were criticized for the inability to settle on a claim, for long-winded and pedantic musings, for a lack of conciseness.

I wondered if something similar might have happened to Patrick. Once his work was labeled “developmental,” would his instructors be able to tell the difference? Especially when so few composition instructors have formal training in composition studies³? Patrick had no idea how he wound up in his remedial classes. He views his own perceived ineptitudes as the only logical conclusion. He says, “I was really bad in school. I didn’t take it seriously. I was pretty immature.” Again, I remembered Mike Rose:

...Placement in a remedial course confirmed their suspicions. The danger here was that they might not be able to separate out their particular problems with calculus or critical writing from their own image of themselves as thinkers, from their intellectual self-worth. The ugly truth was exposed. The remedial designation or the botched essay or the disastrous midterm ripped through their protective medals. (Rose, 1987, p. 173).

I wonder if this same process might be happening internally, if Patrick is beginning to self-identify as a remedial student. This is habitus taking shape. It seems to make sense, especially since Patrick has made the leap to thinking about himself as a someone for whom college was never an option.

Internalizing remediation. Patrick admits to being uncomfortable at the community college, where his discomfort seems anchored to both a general sense of unpreparedness as well

³ The issue of underprepared developmental writing instructors is explored more fully in Chapter 5, when I interview two instructors from SPCC.

as what he perceives to be fundamental intellectual deficiency. This is reflected in how he speaks about his developmental writing classes. He argues that he is...

...where I should be, you know building up, you know if this is 101 or 01, it's not even the stuff I'm taking, and I'm nervous with it, and I might be struggling on it, and stuff I never knew about. Then I guess I needed it, but you know to gain the knowledge that I should have. I haven't been in school for so long, so I think it's perfect for me.

Like both Joey and Meryem before him, Patrick identifies the college as a place to “gain the knowledge that [he] should have,” but implicit in this statement is the internalization of the structure of remediation. Patrick seems like he believes that he *needs* remediation, even if no one at the college can really explain why.

When Patrick argues that developmental writing is “perfect for [him],” he seems to be accepting his position in the field as it is oriented through the interrelated and overlapping structures and fields implicit in higher education and higher education policy. This process of internalization takes form in the shape of the identities generated through habitus and doxa and has significant influence of how Patrick views himself as well as his aptitudes.

As we continued our interviews, conversation drifted from questions of identity. As we moved closer to Patrick's academic experiences, his writing sample was never far from my mind. I revisited his sample and found myself stuck on his final sentiment:

I'm happy that I was placed into remedial English and Math because I can now enhance and improve my areas where I needed much work on and not have to feel like I'm way out of my depth in learning.

I had mixed feelings about this statement. On the one hand, it was encouraging to see an adult learner—a veteran—challenging common doxa, fighting back against habitus, and returning to

college with optimistic feelings about his academic future. On the other hand, it was upsetting to see anyone so readily accept and internalize the prescription for remedial coursework, especially under such murky circumstances and without question.

Maybe Patrick really was writing at a level that required academic intervention and supplemental instruction. I was not there to make that decision. Instead, I turned my attention to questions about the VA and his admissions process. The more I spoke with him, the clearer it became. Patrick was unsure, moreover Patrick was *uncomfortable*. He stuttered when he confessed to never taking an academic assessment exam prior to enrolling in developmental coursework. There may be a completely rational reason as to why Patrick never took the test, what matters, however, is that—if there was—Patrick is not aware of it. When I asked him about the test, he pivoted, shifting his focus back to his appreciation of the VA Resource Center, which he believes “waived” the exam, so that he could “gain the knowledge that [he] should have.”

Connections. In this section, I organized Patrick’s observations and experiences with policy implementation at the community college based on the longer and more salient passages from our interviews. In these passages I saw someone who struggled with understanding why he was placed into developmental coursework without a placement test, but he appeared more troubled by the prospect of raising the question to the VA Resource Center. I couldn’t help but think of that old expression, “Don’t bite the hand that feeds you.” Does Patrick feel like the VA Resource Center did him a favor? He certainly doesn’t seem to believe he has the merit to be a community college student. This is exemplified most clearly when he talks about his writing classes and his academic ability.

In this section I traced Patrick’s attempts to rationalize and understand how and why he was placed into developmental coursework at the community college. His deference to both the

VA Resource Center's benevolence and his academic short-comings seems to represent that he, like Meryem, has internalized some of the effects of structures and habitus. He has assumed the position in the field as it has been prescribed.

While Patrick challenges the common traditions of his family and upbringing, he is unwilling to question his placement into developmental coursework, even though he is aware that it has some impact on his financial standing at the college. This understanding underpins the latter portion of this section, where it becomes clear that Patrick struggles with policy literacy at the community college. The impacts and implications of this struggle are more fully explored in the upcoming chapter wherein I interview instructors at the college and organize the implications of this phenomena.

Concluding Thoughts and Lingering Questions

Across these three cases Joey, Meryem, and Patrick highlight the shifting complexities associated with the field of higher education and its respective structures. In particular, the structures of remediation, financial aid, and student support services all play important roles in shaping or defining the positions of these participants. Such structures work to perpetuate the common doxa associated with school or home life by habituating behavior and perceptions about the self as well as school.

Joey's perception of school, for example, is characterized by his understanding of education as a form of symbolic capital. This understanding situates him in the field as an agent seeking social mobility and capital gain. Meryem, on the other hand, perceives herself as not a "good-student" but instead as a "hard-worker." These opinions are not innate, but rather appear generated by the habituating structures of academic placement and advisement. Finally, Patrick is positioned according to his previous educational experiences and family upbringing. Because

school was “never really an option,” he views it as a privilege—one which he is reluctant to trouble.

In each of the aforementioned cases, the ways in which these students were habituated influences their experiences and outcomes with various administrative offices and policies at the community college—sometimes to detrimental effect. For Joey, the fact that his classes are not commensurate toward his college degree drives him to a point of frustration and to ultimately withdraw from the school. Meryem’s sense of identity as it is positioned around her ability to navigate the college’s bureaucracies hinges on her expediency and grit. If she makes a mistake, the effects may be not simply logistical. They could impact her sense of identity and position in the field. Finally, Patrick’s internalized position, as an academic outsider, is problematic when we consider how his reluctance to question his academic placement may have palpable effects on his experience beyond the community college. Since his courses are funded through the GI Bill, he may realistically exhaust subsidies before he completes a four-year degree.

In each of these cases, policies and protocols at the community college have palpable impacts on students enrolled in developmental English coursework. These impacts are compounded and complicated by previous academic and existential experiences. Experiences like performance or treatment in high school, military service, or home-life doxa work to affect the way these students feel about themselves and their potential at the community college.

Because each of these students attended the community college with the aspiration of adjusting or ameliorating their position in related fields of power, I am left with the following question: How might the structures of community colleges work to disenfranchise already ostracized students enrolled in developmental coursework? In the next chapter, I consider this question from the perspective of two instructors at SPCC, both of whom regularly teach

developmental English courses. Their perspectives offer important context to the complicated issues associated with student experience of higher education policy implementation at community colleges.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion of Data from Instructors

I started teaching developmental writing at community colleges the fall after I finished my Master's degree. I never studied education, never studied pedagogy, and only took one course in Rhetoric and Composition studies while enrolled in graduate school. I wrote my thesis on Foucault. *Sure, I could stumble my way through a lecture on post-structuralism, but how did this prepare me to teach developmental writers?* My interests in the complexities of teaching first-year writing developed just two years earlier, as a rookie teaching assistant, and I hadn't been in a community college since I was a student at one. Put simply, I was wholly and hopeless underprepared to teach struggling writers at community colleges.

And yet I taught multiple sections of developmental writing for a full year while applying to doctoral programs. The more I worked with these students, I began to ask increasingly critical questions. Driving home from campus, I'd turn the radio off and think about assessment, college cost, placement exams, and whether or not I really believed in the mission of the community college. Occasionally, I would search for statistics, though I didn't know what I was looking for. I looked up completion rates at community colleges, rates of persistence amongst developmental writers, rates of transfer, and information on student loans.

I began to recognize that these were questions I couldn't answer on my own, and so I started searching for doctoral programs. A year later, I enrolled at Teachers College hoping for the formal training and critical dialogue I was missing. I wanted to talk about the teaching of writing, the nuances of community colleges, and both the politics and the pedagogy of developmental writing.

As a doctoral student, however, I couldn't help but feel somewhat isolated and a little disappointed. Most of the coursework in English Education focused on either secondary

education or teacher training. Higher education was discussed in the policy and social analysis departments, but my colleagues in those programs did not aspire to teach. This may be something of a generalization, but it quickly became clear that there if there was a scholarly forum for the discussion of both the pedagogy and political contexts relative to developmental writers at community colleges, it was hard to find. It appeared as though those who studied policy didn't teach, while those who taught didn't study policy. I'd looked at both the community college and at graduate schools of education. I started to wonder, is anyone *really* qualified to teach developmental writing at the community college?

The following chapter approaches this question, but it does not provide any answers. In the section that follows, I introduce two community college instructors—one adjunct and one associate professor—and consider how they approach the converging issues, nuances, and intricacies of developmental writing at the community college. I was curious about how they managed their students, navigated the complexities of the classrooms, and approached the policies influencing their students and their classrooms.

I chose to include instructors in this study because I wanted to better understand how they observed policy and finance as it interacts with both their teaching and their students' experiences in the classroom and at the college. This, I believe, represents the intersection most important in the teaching of developmental writing at community colleges. Instructors need *both* pedagogical skills attuned to working with emerging writers as well as a functional understanding of the politics and policies relevant to their students and the community college. As I conducted my research on this dissertation, it became clear that these two necessities are symbiotic. Without an understanding of the policies, constraints, and conditions unique to the

developmental writing course and the developmental writing student, instructors will struggle to tailor effective pedagogies.

Instructors had to be a part of this study. It was clear that student experience was only a part of the picture, that the instructors were part of the situation. Of course, they were engaged in their students' learning, but the politics of instruction are also woven into the institution of community colleges. Who teaches developmental writing and why became important questions. In my experience, there is an unspoken truth among developmental writing instructors, that their responsibility does not end with literacy instruction.

More importantly, working from a Bourdieuan framework, these instructors represent a different position in the field of higher education. Amongst them, too, are different positions. As an adjunct, Barbara is exposed to different structures and sub-fields than Melody, and vice-versa. Between them, this chapter presents a dynamic portrait of how different positions represent different experiences at the community college and amongst individual developmental writing courses.

If first year composition is the bridge to the college, and remediation is a moat, developmental writing instructors ferry students across. They teach writing, but they also function as an introduction to the college community. They offer career advice and workshop resumes. Given the confessional nature of first-year writing courses, they often take on the role of talk-therapist. Ask any developmental writing instructor, and they will have stories—stories about students who share, students who struggle, and students who succeed.

In the section that follows, I present some of those stories as articulated by two developmental writing instructors at SPCC; Barbara, an adjunct lecturer working on her doctorate in educational administration, and Melody, a full-time associate professor with content

specialization in medieval studies, both of whom elect to teach their developmental coursework. I provide lengthy quotations, as I believe it is their words that matter the most here. I organized this section according to their similarities, their differences, their shared experiences and questions, and finally their deepest concerns.

I asked Barbara and Melody about what it is like to teach developmental writing and whether or not they elected to teach those classes on their own. I asked them about their own knowledge about college financial aid policies but also about what they thought their colleagues might know. I asked them about grading policies, classroom practice, their students, the particularities of adjuncts, and about state and federal policy initiatives that might have an impact on developmental writing in the future. These questions get at the nuance and complexity of structures and sub-fields like remediation, financial aid, and admissions policies, as they interact and overlap in the field of higher education at community colleges.

Barbara and Melody's stories are interrelated, and so rather than present them as isolated case-studies, this chapter is divided into two primary sections, "Understanding Policy" and "the Implications of Policy," which I believe best organize the threads strewn between the interviews. Throughout our discussions, these two concepts came to represent the majority of our talking points. It became obvious that many students and instructors struggle with not only the nuances of financial aid and administrative policy, but also the basic requirements for such courses. Few instructors and virtually no students understand developmental studies' complex network of policies and protocols, and the implications of this are severe for all involved parties. Barbara puts it best, "You're teaching developmental writing, and you don't know about the end requirement of that course. Wow, that's problematic." By organizing this chapter into sections dedicated to our understandings of higher education policy and then the implications of those

policies, this section helps to produce a more holistic portrait of the intersecting, overlapping, and interacting aspects of higher education policy, school finance, remediation, and the politics of community colleges as they are related in the field.

Barbara

The students enrolled in Barbara's developmental writing courses are the lucky ones. She is an expert in student support services, a doctoral candidate in educational leadership and administration, and she knows the ins-and-outs of the political network unique to community college. Still, like nearly all developmental writing instructors, she lacks formal training in writing pedagogy and college remediation. She holds an MFA in creative writing but has since specialized in first-year writing and supporting disenfranchised writers and underrepresented students. She taught first-year writing at public colleges in New York City and Atlanta before settling on Long Island where she continues her work at multiple local colleges. In addition to teaching at these schools, she sits on faculty committees for student success and works as an academic support specialist. Her doctoral studies in higher education administrative and leadership focuses primarily on supporting disenfranchised and underrepresented college students. She has taught at SPCC for nearly a decade.

Having taught alongside Barbara, I can attest to the fact that her career is best characterized by a commitment to student support. She describes her work, and her multiple positions, at length in our interview:

... the underlying thing would be about student development, so in that way they are all related. Like at [one college], I work with pretty much all adult students, and they are students who probably as classified as going into a developmental course, so yeah it really is all related. It's just about trying to meet the students where they are right now,

and then get them to place where they want to—and essentially need to—be for whatever their goals are academically, and their whole selves basically.

Barbara’s “whole-self” philosophy recognizes students as the complex autonomous beings they are, but she is sensitive to, and knowledgeable about, the material constraints under which many of her students live and learn. She describes this simply, when she reminds me that no matter how well she plans her courses,

... life-happens, and we find that life happens especially here at the community college with these students, so when we start getting towards the end and start getting their portfolio ready, I am definitely a little bit more relaxed if someone is late, or if someone hasn’t had some of the material, and I try to work with whoever that might be, because I—myself—do not want them to then have to take this course again...

This understanding of what Peter Adams (2009) calls the “non-cognitive constraints” experienced by many developmental writers is not unique amongst the faculty at SPCC. When I asked Barbara about her commitment to supporting students, she was quick to remind me that most of her colleagues at SPCC share this belief. What sets Barbara apart is her intricate knowledge of the policies and protocols. She says clarifying these policies to her students is a “part of the job.”

In this sense, Barbara recognizes policy literacy and the methods of translation as an important duty for developmental writing instructors. Because their students occupy such tenuous positions in the field, this argument became a common theme throughout our interview and warranted its own subsection later in this chapter. Developmental writing instructors are tasked with many responsibilities, some of which they are underqualified to perform efficiently.

This, of course, is no fault of the instructors themselves but rather reflects deeper institutional problems within both the curriculum and the college.

Barbara is acutely aware of these problems and despite her vast experience and formal training in the politics and sociology of higher education, she admits to making decisions in the classroom based on gut-instinct. She shares this practice with Melody, my second instructor-participant, who admits to the “on the job training” required for developmental writing instructors. Both Barbara and Melody are established instructors who regularly teach developmental writing. In both of their stories, they display an openness and will to grow, to ask questions, and to consider their practice from new perspectives.

Melody

Melody has taught at SPCC for over fifteen years. She’s been teaching developmental writing for the last ten. Though she admits to having “... no pedagogical training in developmental writing. It’s all been on-the-job-training and listening to, learning what the students need,” she regularly teaches the course, even requests it. She has had enough success to start teaching in the pilot program for the Accelerated Learning Program. Amongst the department, she is recognized as something of an unconventional expert.

Throughout our interview, Melody seems self-conscious of her lack of formal training. She understands the complex needs of these students and appears to lament the fact that there is no scholarly forum for effectively training developmental writing instructors. Still, she recognizes the fact that teaching outside of one one’s specialty is a necessary reality at the community college.

...When you teach at a community college... this is going to be a thing that is repeatedly asked of you. Like me with the linguistics class, it’s the same sort of thing. Like, “We

need somebody to teach this—You can kinda teach this!” And you just bring yourself up to the level, so I think that’s just one of the things community colleges and community college instructors face that many regular college instructors don’t. You know, we don’t stick to our specialties, so we often have to multi-task, and on-the-job-training.

Melody’s recognition of the community college’s unique constraints and requirements seems to imply that such understandings cannot be taught, only learned through working at the community college, as a sort of embodied social and cultural capital.

Despite how Melody feels about her lack of formal training, she remains deeply attuned to her students and their experiences in her class. She also admits that most who teach developmental writing do not have a complete understanding of the policy constraints on the class and their students, which Melody describes empathetically: “Adjuncts are so busy trying to teach a good class and not the paperwork...” that they often misjudge or are completely unaware of how policy affects their students.

Melody’s practical sense of problem solving becomes clear when she addresses the issues that she sees play out in her classes. Still, she emphasizes that she has only learned these lessons through direct contact with her students, through practice. For example, at the beginning of each semester, Melody keeps a running calendar in her head. She has learned that both state and federal aid awards are disbursed about a week after classes begin. This means her students will not see those funds, and cannot use them to purchase their textbooks, until about the third of fourth class session. In her words, “the way the students have explained it, the textbook money does not come to them until the first week of class, so if I have them do homework from the homework, then to some of them that represents a hardship, because they can’t outlay the cash and get reimbursed.” This type of practical issue is miles away from the experience of an

instructor, especially a novice instructor worried about course preparation, syllabus design, and classroom management. Even Melody admits to understanding this issue only through direct contact with students.

Throughout our interview Melody muses on the implications of bad policy design on her classroom. She thinks about the campus-wide attendance policy, which states that absence equivalent to one week's coursework results in a failure of the course. Of course, instructors have leeway here, but most instructors opt to threaten a reduced grade, but this type of bargaining doesn't work in developmental writing, because the course is graded on a Pass/Fail basis. What seems like a moot point reveals deep problems with policy implementation in the developmental writing course, as Melody explains:

So if I say, I deduct 10 points, I deduct 10 points from what? 10 points deducted from "pass" equals what? So, it's sort of more interesting... Some people I know will say, if you miss 5 or more classes, you won't be able to submit your portfolio, so at least there is some sort of policy that tries to reinforce that attendance is important, but at the same time you're trying to be more lenient than the school's official policy.

This type of scenario exemplifies the complexity of the relationship between policy, pedagogy, and classroom management. Melody has a good understanding of the campus attendance and enrollment policies, but as it would come to be clear, the same cannot be said of all of her colleagues at the community college.

Understanding Policy

The follow section explores questions concerning policy and policy literacies in the related fields of the community college and developmental writing. I asked Barbara and Melody about their own understandings of policies relevant to community colleges and developmental

courses, their assumptions about the understandings others who teach in their department, and about their assumptions or observations about students' understandings of these policies. It is a documented fact that loan lending practices vary according to students' generational status. First-generation students, many of whom are developmental writers, disproportionately take out loans with more complex lending terms and requirements (Furquim, Glasener, Oster, McCall, & DesJardins, 2017). According to Barbara and Melody's observations, few of these students fully grasp this.

Recognizing how well both instructors and their students understand policy design is critical in understanding how community colleges work. Many instructors who teach developmental writing have their hearts in the right place, but without the requisite policy literacy, they may do more harm than help. I have often heard instructors of developmental writing celebrate the "toughness" of their grading, believing that their job is to repair a student's writing before they make it into the freshman writing course. While I may protest this sentiment on a pedagogical level, as I am reminded of Hsun Tzu's (2009) argument about education wherein teaching students is compared to straightening a board, the more important aspect of this argument comes when we recognize that repeated failures in developmental education exhausted financial aid and exclusive enrollment in developmental studies prohibits students from accessing many need-based award programs.

Instructors cannot be blamed for not understanding this, but they should be responsible for learning it. The following section highlights instances wherein instructors reflect on their experiences in the classroom, with colleagues, and with students. They explain how a misunderstanding of policy or protocol at the community college can result in problems for students, regardless of their academic performance.

SWUR: Developmental Assessment Policies

Perhaps the most striking aspect of policy literacy amongst both students and instructors in developmental writing courses is the confusion surrounding grading and accreditation. Even I was confused after talking to Barbara and Melody. I haven't taught at SPCC in years, so I figured I'd revisit the English department website to get some clarity. When I followed the hyperlinks from page to page and finally clicked on "developmental writing," I was brought to a dead page. Where could I find the answers? I couldn't help but wonder how many students have done the same thing, sought out the information, and wound up at this same dead end. It seems an apt metaphor for the confusion surrounding these policies. Maybe we can't blame the students, after all...

It took a while, but I was able to track down some information. After navigating my way to the course catalog, I read that developmental reading and writing courses were assigned according to placement exam score, graded on an S-W-U-R basis and could not be applied to any degree or certificate. Still, this was unclear. What does SWUR mean, anyway? I could not find this information on the college website.

This grading policy came up in both of my interviews. It came up first in my conversation with Melody. She explained the grading policy as "Satisfactory, Unsatisfactory, or Repeat--which, if they've completed all of the work, but they just didn't complete it at the college level, they get the 'R.' And then Withdraw is W." I asked her how accessible this information was, if it was generally understood. She responded frankly: "I'm going to say no, because it actually wasn't until two years into my teaching this course that someone actually explained what 'R' meant to me, and that's because I asked, 'What is the difference--I don't understand.' Like I had to hunt it down." So it wasn't just me. This information was as confusing

as it was inaccessible. Even if a student had the initiative to track this information down, it was still confusing. And, judging by Melody's statements, even if they asked their instructors, they might be out of luck.

Barbara shared similar sentiments. Her students do not typically understand the assessment processes either, so she attempts..." to engage them and tell them how valuable this course is to them and that... just trying to motivate them so that they feel better about the situation." But she also adds that many instructional faculty, and most part-time faculty, do not understand the SWUR policies either. She explains this in an extended response:

I don't think that they are well-informed. It takes time for you to know the institution's policies about those things. It takes time for you to be informed it about that thing, right? So, just coming in, I didn't know my first semester. So, thinking back to my first semester, "This is it," and someone told me that they don't get credit for this, that this is just a pre-req for them to get into 101, and I was like, "Oh, okay," and that's pretty much what I knew, so... but it's always been a population I'm interested in, so I'm not sure if everybody else is doing that sort of research or... and if they're brand new, I can't imagine that they are... I'm actually mentoring a new adjunct. She came last year. We had coffee and stuff. So, her first semester, she didn't teach developmental, and I think that might be kind of—if at all possible—they try not to do that anymore? I don't know. Maybe? ::laughs:: I don't think it's an official rule, but I think they may just try not to do that... so this year, she got a developmental writing and a 101, and then the e-mails about the portfolio reading came up, and she e-mailed me and said, "Hi, I haven't talked to you, but I got developmental writing this semester and a 101. I saw this e-mail about a portfolio—what is that?" So, I was like, "Oh, cool..." I have all the information, and I gave her the information, but "You're teaching developmental writing, and you don't know about the end requirement of that course. Wow, that's problematic."

Barbara is emphatic in her frustration with such a fundamental lack of information, though she remains empathetic to her fellow part-time faculty. She believes this problem stems from the institution, the nature of adjunct labor, rather than an individual ineptitude. She reminds me that adjuncts simply do not "have the institutional knowledge, because you're not there. You don't have an office. You're floating around, but you're also teaching at 10 thousand different places, so even if there is an info session like that, you're not available to go."

Credit Commensuration & Actual Cost

College cost and financial aid policies are inarguably the most widely discussed and controversial topics concerning the material constraints on underrepresented students enrolled in higher education. The problem is two-fold. First, college cost is unfathomably high. Since 1980, the price of tuition has risen over 200% (Newfield, 2016), and this paying for college out-of-pocket impossible for virtually all students except those from elite and wealthy families. Second, financial aid policies are so cryptic and loan lending policies so predatory, that many students who cannot afford to pay for college out of pocket wind up in financial situations far worse than if they had not enrolled in the first place because they lack the requisite cultural or social capital necessary to negotiate for better loan conditions.

Barbara and Melody both indicate that the most insidious and ubiquitous aspects of policy illiteracy become clear when students apply for financial aid. Melody puts it best, to many students, financial aid is “like magic money.” In general, and for most college students, college cost is almost an abstraction. For community college students from modest economic backgrounds, thousands of dollars might as well be millions of dollars. Either way, it is more money than most have ever seen. The costs are astronomical, and interest rates are not easily understood. Put simply, a five-thousand-dollar loan taken out with a 6.8% APY interest rate grows \$340.00 annually, but these numbers are obfuscated by the complexity of a student’s bill, buried in fees, allowances, and the cost of tuition. Understanding college coursework is hard enough, understanding college finance is a whole other animal.

When Barbara recalls her students’ realizations of their financial and academic standing, she describes a state of “shock and dismay.” Melody describes similar situations: “I think it’s

because they're on financial aid, and they don't see the numbers. You know it's like magic money.... As you know they don't see the bill, and then they see the bill and they gasp."

Both Barbara and Melody cite explaining to their students that their developmental coursework is costing them money while not counting toward their degree, but this fact does not seem to resonate. Barbara explains this clearly:

I don't think students are aware. I'm not sure how it's explained to them, because you think of the process... They come in and take this test that they had no clue about—there's no studying or anything—and then they're in this class. They're like, "Oh, cool—this is the class I'm taking." They don't even understand that this is not counting toward your credit, but it is exhausting your financial aid, and you have to think about a student who might be in developmental English and developmental Math...

Such circumstances are not uncommon, as research supports that students enrolled in developmental English are more likely to also enroll in developmental Math. And since many of these students are first-generation learners, they do not know much about the differences between developmental and freshman writing courses. Barbara reasons that her students struggle at the conceptual level. *Why wouldn't this class count for credit?* Melody relays similar experiences:

I've had students tell me that this is a waste of time, and student parents will often say that this is a way for the school to get money from them. So they didn't view this as a skills thing. Students have said that they were frustrated that 101 is a prerequisite for that they can't take, and so they're feeling as though they're being held up.

Above all else, Barbara and Melody observe frustration and confusion concerning their developmental coursework and financial aid. Such feelings are justified. Nowhere is this material

clearly articulated, and as Barbara says, “I don’t think they’re getting that... information from financial aid or orientation.”

Both Barbara and Melody indicate that more often than not, these understandings blossom in the developmental writing course. They are actualized through experience, which puts the developmental writing instructor directly into dialogue with students about policies and protocols beyond their understanding⁴. Thus, these policy decisions directly impact the developmental writing course Melody describes this most clearly when she describes how financial aid policies impacts her students’ textbooks:

They focus on the stress of the textbooks--that’s where it comes out. For some weird reason, the way the students have explained it, the textbook money does not come to them until the first week of class, so if I have them do homework from the homework, then to some of them that represents a hardship, because they can’t outlay the cash and get reimbursed. So, a lot of them say, I can’t get the book until next week. So, I’ve tried to compensate for that by having a free textbook or a photocopy for the first week, because I know the financial aid thing... I know some students also decide not to buy the textbook, and I say decide and I hope that doesn’t sound flippant. I say decide because it’s a calculus that they’ve done.

While such a vignette might seem superficial, what the students are experiencing is an incongruity between classroom experience and financial aid policy. The policy isn’t working. Put simply, students are accessing financial aid to attend class, but then the methods of administering financial aid awards are making it impossible to complete the coursework. Such miscalculations make learning more difficult—the students don’t have the books—but they also make students *feel* as though the proverbial deck is stacked against them, a feeling many already have after placing into developmental writing courses.

⁴ In the understandings chapter of the dissertation, I call for more research into how instructors might best handle such situations. Given that the developmental writing instructor has no professional experience or qualifications in discussing policy, finance, or college advising, instructors can only offer anecdotal support. While this may be helpful in some cases, this issue requires more concerted attention.

In short, it seems as though these policies are functions as the type of structures Pierre Bourdieu described as working to maintain current relations of power and preserving the status, orientation and doxa of the field as a whole. Such a relationship is clearly evidenced in the ways in which policy and classroom experience interact and overlap at the community college and in developmental English courses.

The Implications of Policy

I recognize that dividing this chapter into two sections is somewhat artificial. One might logically argue that a misunderstanding is, itself, an example of problematic policies. If a developmental writing instructor doesn't understand grading policies, then the impact is such that the instructor cannot have a clear goal for the course, and ultimately the students suffer. In the previous section, I spoke with Barbara and Melody about their students, their colleagues, and their own misunderstandings of the policies and politics surrounding their work in community college developmental writing classes. It is clear that many developmental writing instructors are unaware of the financial implications of their courses, but both Barbara and Melody place responsibility on the institution, not necessarily the individual.

In the following section, I discuss the rollout, impact, and unintended consequences of both the implementation and obfuscation of higher education policy on the developmental writing course. Melody is the exception to the rule—a capable full-time faculty member who elects to teach developmental writing. In general, this section focuses on adjuncts and the impacts of higher education policy. These impacts range from the influence of staffing policy on an instructor's comfort, ability, or willingness to teach developmental writing to the fact that many developmental writing instructors end up taking on unofficial roles, many of which they are underqualified to perform. While this passage may seem to vilify adjunct instructors, I ask that you read the

following section with the following facts in mind: Adjuncts earn an average of \$16,718.00 from a single employer and work without health insurance. 60% of adjuncts work more than one job with little to no professional or financial security (Birmingham, 2017 Feb).

Teaching Outside of Specialization

Neither Barbara nor Melody began teaching developmental writing with formal training in the discipline. Barbara has since developed a professional interest in the field, committing her doctoral studies to student support services, while Melody views her role as a developmental writing instructor as something she has generated through practice, which she calls “on the job training.” Both represent compassionate instructors who have strayed away from their original specializations but remain committed to supporting emerging writers and regularly teach multiple sections of developmental writing at SPCC.

This, I believe, is significant for two reasons. First, it reinforces my suspicion and observation that there is not larger institutional program or policy to support the efforts of individual instructors seeking to ameliorate the state of developmental writing. Second, it becomes clear to me that the students who wind up in their classes are lucky, but most students are likely to be taught by instructors outside of the discipline.

One might reasonably argue that the field of English suffers something of an identity crisis. It has always been a hybrid discipline. English departments regularly schedule courses as varied and unrelated as business writing and technical communication, science-fiction and gothic horror, and metaphysical poetry and the Victorian novel. James Berlin (1987) represents this as the fundamental divide between rhetoric and composition and belles-lettres. In my observations, many tasked with teaching the freshman writing course have specialized graduate degrees in literature, creative writing, and even journalism.

Because of this, many community college instructors, and nearly all developmental writing instructors are teaching outside of their specialties. The impact is such that many who teach developmental writing, are as Melody describes “learning on the job,” and since many adjuncts teach on multiple campuses—which means multiple different policies and protocols, administrators, and representatives from administrative offices—they are often physically unable to ask for the help they may need.

The implications of this phenomenon cannot be overstated. Even if a developmental writing instructor is motivated, compassionate, and excited to teach the course, they are nearly always teaching outside of their skill sets. This results in the students who need the most support, receiving instruction from the most underprepared, or at least inexperienced, faculty members.

Developmental Writing Becomes a Support Service

Developmental writing is complicated. It is simultaneously an academic course and a pre-college course, while inextricably linked to support services like the educational opportunity program (EOP), the accelerated learning program (ALP), and federal TRiO programs, like Upward Bound. Developmental writing is associated with, though not necessarily a part of, these support services given the disproportionate number of students who place into developmental writing from low-income and underrepresented communities. Because of this, developmental writing instructors are often teaching not only the most academically underprepared students, they are also teaching the most economically disadvantaged students.

Both Barbara and Melody comment on this throughout their interviews. Barbara has more professional experience and formal training in support services, but Melody has come to understand some of the political nuances of teaching development writing through other responsibilities at the community college. I asked her about college cost and students’ reactions

to accruing debt while enrolled in developmental writing, and she responded by describing her experiences in academic dismissal hearings, which she understands is a place many students first confront their mounting debt.

... Our academic dismissal hearings are for students who have failed two semesters, and there's more language I could look up for you, but I haven't done it in a semester or two, so I've forgotten it, but basically they are failing out, and before we let them come back, they have to come talk to us. And some of them have really compelling stories, like "my mother died," or "I was homeless," so you sit there and go--okay, there's a reason, your head wasn't in the game. But other students say, "Well, I was working 40 hours a week," so you ask, "What's your plan for this semester," and they say, "I'm gonna work 40 hours a week," and you can say, "Okay, you didn't figure it out yet. You didn't get what caused the problem." But one of the things I always ask at those dismissal hearings is, I ask about their financial situation, because some of them are already 10, 15, 20 thousand dollars in debt. And they have no idea. I think it's because they're on financial aid, and they don't see the numbers. You know it's like magic money.... As you know they don't see the bill, and then they see the bill and they gasp.

Melody's experience with the academic dismissal hearing committee was not required because she taught developmental writing, rather it was a contingency of her position as an associate professor at SPCC. Still, there are parallel responsibilities between the two. On the academic dismissal hearing committee, Melody observed struggling students with mounting student debt. Barbara describes a similar feeling of responsibility when she observes what she describes as the "shock and dismay."

"Perform Other Duties as Assigned"

In the fall of 2014, I too was teaching developmental writing at SPCC. As I sat across from a colleague one lunch, I read through student e-mails. While reading, my colleague and I spoke about our students, our classes, and the wide-range of additional positions we were asked to perform as developmental writing instructors: life coach, college ambassador, academic tutor, etc. "I often feel like a super utility-infielder," I remember saying. "Yes," my colleague replied, "Will perform other duties as assigned." This type of office banter is not unique to the

community college. Visit any break room in America, and you will find tired workers lamenting that which is “not in the job description.” But amongst the pantheon of academic instructors, developmental writing instructors may reasonably argue that they are disproportionately affected by a wide range of tasks and needs. It is also important to remember that most developmental writing instructors are part-time faculty, and so they lack the time, space, and resources to complete many of these tasks. Simply put, community college developmental writing instructors are asked to do a lot, much of which could not be accurately represented in a course description. Teaching developmental writing is often as one colleague flippantly called it, “crisis management.”

Student support specialist is just one of the extra roles developmental writing instructors are expected to take on. Melody describes herself as a coach, while Barbara describes herself as “out there trying to explain financial aid, and I don’t know!” Throughout both of my interviews Barbara and Melody describe their jobs are requiring them to take on the role of instructor, coach, someone who can explain college policy and financial aid, advocate, life coach, and counselor. The confessional nature of freshman writing often coaxes students to be more autobiographical, honest, and forthcoming, and so oftentimes writing instructors may become privy to sensitive information concerning students’ personal lives.

For example, Barbara describes working with one struggling developmental writer, an adult learner and mother who was returning to college. According to Barbara, she would not have passed her course without hours of additional attention both from Barbara and the writing center:

I worked with the student probably for two hours outside of class and basically tried to cover the revision process that she had missed, so she herself together and finally got the final portfolio in, and it was borderline, and so I talked to the student, and it was an older student who had kids and everything... I had the student kind of promise ::laughs:: that

they would kind of continue going along the path of going to the writing center and using any other support services that they needed, and I went ahead and passed it—it was borderline—but I went ahead, and I asked the student... but that is something I actually do every semester, so if I have borderline students that I feel like they will be making steady progression...

In this story, Barbara indicates that her student probably wouldn't have passed the portfolio or the class if she didn't know her personal story, work ethic, and commitment to higher education.

Barbara describes herself as a “hard-ass grader,” but also indicates that she is nearly always running the following question through her mind: “If this student was in my 101, could they be successful if they gave it a hundred percent?” Because there are so many interreacting and overlapping issues in the developmental writing course—of which basic writing proficiency is only one--this question, she says, guides many of her assessment decisions. It requires her to play multiple contradictory roles: “hard-ass grader,” empathetic listener, fair and just evaluator, writing instructor.

Both Barbara and Melody identify part of their job as a sort of interpreter, guiding their students through the complexities of the college landscape. This is a necessary because:

Sometimes they get into developmental writing, and they don't even know its developmental writing. Like, so they absolutely don't know the situation... Um... I think it would cause them to maybe make different decisions throughout the semester, if they had this on their mind. I don't think... And like I said, students are often shocked and dismayed. I've had students in my class, where it's their second time, or third time

This added responsibility is not necessarily outside of the job description. All instructors should be invested in their students' success, but what makes it so complicated for developmental writing instructors is that since there is no numerical grading system, no real guidelines for what is passing or failing, instructors wrestle with explaining the course policies to their students

while also committing to their own understandings. These understandings may differ between instructors, so one might realistically pass developmental writing in one section and fail it in another.

Not Just Learning Outcomes

As mentioned in the sub-section above, teaching developmental writing means playing more roles than just developmental writing instructor. Barbara's stories about her borderline student represent this well, as they highlight some of the tensions experienced by developmental writing instructors. Quantitative metrics teach us that low-income and minority students are disproportionately represent amongst developmental writing classes, have higher rates of attrition, and lower rates of graduation. Put less mathematically, Barbara says, "Life happens especially here at the community college."

Both Barbara and Melody recognize the non-cognitive constraints experienced by their students. They are often adult learners, parents, veterans, second language learners, and working to support themselves. Because of this, and because of the confessional nature of the writing class—wherein instructors are privy to more information about their students' personal lives— instructors need to make a judgment call. Barbara and Melody are mostly informed about the funding practices associated with college remediation. They know that their students are exhausting their financial aid while not earning any credits. They understand that there is an opportunity cost to enrolling in college, that being in class means missing out on earning time and work hours, time with family, and other basic existential needs.

Clearly, this is a good thing. Having informed and empathetic faculty teaching these classes can only help students, but it may be reasonable to argue that it also complicates the job experience for the instructors. If you have instructors who are ignorant or indifferent to their

students' personal—rather than academic—needs, we wind up with the most disenfranchised students learning without the necessary support structures from the college. But, if on the other hand, instructors consider their students personal, financial, and existential needs they may be compromising on their academic rigor. And who is to say that their next professor will be just as empathetic?

I do not have answers to these questions. I am simply reporting some amalgamation of Barbara and Melody's words paired with my own experiences learning, teaching, and researching at community colleges. In the next chapter, I explore the implications of this research, consider future questions, and aim to articulate any understandings about the tensions between and transactional nature of higher education policy, community colleges, remediation, and college finance. It is clear, at least to me, that the conversation does not start or end with the students, nor can it be accurately—or even honestly—reported via quantitative metrics. Those numbers, however, do tell us something important. They set the backdrop, like a base coat on oil canvas, they articulate the textures of the social and political landscape underpinning student experiences at community colleges.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the stories of Barbara and Melody, both of whom have been teaching developmental writing at SPCC for many years. They have an excess of experience and are well versed in the complexities of teaching developmental writing, especially as it is situated as a structure within the field of higher education.

Both Barbara and Melody recognize the structural aspects of developmental writing, how it intersects with higher education policy and in turn positions students different in the field. It sets some up for failure, while it provides access, opportunity, and promise for others.

While these two cases cannot accurately represent the diverse body of instructors who teach developmental writing at community colleges, they can help us understand how policy works, how it takes shape, and how it influences their teaching, their classes, their colleges, and their students.

Through writing this chapter, I have developed a new appreciation for Bourdieu's Field Theory, as it facilitates dialogues between these various aspects of the college experience. It has become clear that higher education policy only becomes realized once it is experienced among instructors, the college, state and federal governments, and the students themselves. This section, which privileges the perspective of the instructors and recognizes their position as one which necessarily approaches the fields of power and forms of capital differently than students'.

CHAPTER SIX

Understandings and Implications

My first semester at Teachers College cost over of twenty thousand dollars. I didn't have the money, so I took out a loan. I didn't have a choice. I had loans from undergraduate and my master's programs, so I knew what I was getting myself into. I will be alright. I've since established a repayment strategy, organized my loans according to interest rate and have been able to pay down significant portions of the loans with more aggressive rates while still enrolled in graduate school. I am lucky, but I am also a doctoral candidate writing a dissertation on college finance and educational access with a partner whose career involves balancing budgets of hundreds of thousands of dollars for non-profits. Most who take on loans don't spend nearly as much time as I do thinking about them, nor do they have the luxury to do so.

And yet it still took months for me to muster up the courage to open my credit report and confront the mounting debt I'd accrued. Some of those loans date back to my time at the community college. This got me curious. I downloaded a copy of my unofficial transcripts and was able to confirm that every class I'd dropped out of, except for one freshman writing course, when I just stopped showing up, was granted a withdrawal—developmental courses included.

I have been lucky. As an instructor myself, I now understand that granting a withdrawal is a judgment call. Instructors have to interpret a student's performance and behavior and make a decision based on their interpretation of the campus policies concerning attendance and withdrawal. Fortunately for me and my grade point average, those instructors did me a favor. Those impending F's wouldn't drag me down, but the mounting cost of the tuition I paid to simply not show up might have. As a doctoral student at Teachers College, I got lucky again. I was granted academic awards that would cover nearly all of my doctoral studies. After accepting

that award, I sat down with aid counselors who helped me decipher the complexities and the details, but I mostly just trusted them.

Perhaps I should have taken more responsibility, read the conditions of my awards more carefully, and called for help more quickly. But in the summer of 2018, while I was collecting my dissertation data, I was contacted by the office of bursar who informed me that there had been a processing error in the allocation of my award, and I was now responsible for paying a balance of nearly \$4500.00. They explained why, but I was washed with panic and couldn't focus. When I logged onto my student account, I was met with a message that my diploma would be withheld if I didn't pay the fees.

This nearly brought me to tears. I have always carried a nagging suspicion that I was never meant to make it this far, that college still is not really for me, and that one day somebody will figure me out. I understand this happens to many graduate students and that imposter syndrome is a very real disorder, but when I reflect on this study, my data, and the work of Bourdieu, I am confronted with the power of habitus. In truth, I'm really quite uncomfortable in academia, but I've always been able to reframe that as a privilege. I can think about it in a way that gets me closer to the students and preserves some arcane sense of genuineness. It has not, however, been an asset when handling administrative offices.

Following that correspondence with the bursar, I neglected my work for weeks. My inbox flooded while my data sat untouched on my desk. \$4500.00 is a lot of money, but I was able to secure some summer teaching opportunities and pay the fees and continue the degree. Lucky again. Still, I couldn't stop thinking about how my dissertation had come to life—how I was living in the bureaucracy of higher education finance and it was having palpable effects on my work habits, my stress levels, and my sleep. This portrait of the physical impact of college

policy, I believe, captures the implications of my study. While there is much research on college finance and educational access, and an excess of research on pedagogy and student experience, what is missing is an analysis of the intersection of the two. There is little research on the micro-level experiences of students living within the macro-political and social contexts of higher education policy. This dissertation aims to answer that call.

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine the influence of administrative, departmental, state, and federal policies as they played out in the developmental writing classroom and in the lives of developmental writing students. In my earlier chapters, I discussed how these issues converge in an institution like the community college and how it often leaves students adrift, while instructors are left to interpret policies and protocols and make judgment calls about issues they know little about. In this concluding chapter, I seek to connect those moments when policy, pedagogy, and student experience meet.

Because of this project's interdisciplinarity, its indebtedness to both policy and pedagogy, I have organized this chapter according first to my understandings of the data and its implications, then to my recommendations for policy design and implementation and finally to what I believe is fertile ground for future research. In each of these sections I draw from the data presented in chapters four and five and consider it through the relational sociology of Pierre Bourdieu's Field Theory, which I believe best represents the data as it intersects with both political context and student experience.

Understandings and Implications

I came to these understandings by observing the contact points between the finance, policy, and practice of remediation at community colleges. Earlier in this study, I liken their relationship to the aspects of a traffic intersection and articulate the purpose of this study as

pursuing a way to better time the lights and theorize them as relational structures according to Field Theory. In the section that follows, I present my most salient observations and understandings from the data. Across the findings, I address the bureaucracy of community colleges, focusing specifically on observations of problems in policy literacy amongst developmental writing students and faculty, the effect of developmental placement on student identity, and the implementation of student support services.

Policy Literacy and Developmental Writing: Understandings

Few students understand what remediation is or how it affects them. As I look across the data at the stories my participants shared, I am struck by how frequently they mention confusion, obfuscation, stress, or misunderstanding. I believe that this characterizes the discourse of developmental education programs. Few can even agree on what to call these courses. They are interchangeably referred to as developmental, supplemental, basic, and remedial. It occurred to me that the distinction between developmental education and college remediation was more than semantics or political correctness. Developmental English constitutes a collection of courses. It is a program designed to provide supplemental instruction in reading and writing for students who struggle on the placement exam, but remediation is a policy. This is easy to forget. Departments and faculty are quick to celebrate the democratizing effects of developmental education but rarely address the fact that it is implemented based on the policy of remediation.

While this distinction might first appear semantic or superficial, it is worth noting that it has shifted the dialogue away from the policy itself and focused entirely on its implementation. Because of this, few truly understand what remediation is or how Developmental English might seek to address the issues associated with it. For instance, students do not understand how Developmental English is different than Freshman Composition—each have an alien title and

neither denote accreditation. Similarly, instructors often misconstrue the purpose of the course and rarely understand its core elements—what it aims to do, how it is graded, and how it counts in different administrative offices and on a student’s transcript.

Both groups, however, struggle with understanding how college remediation or the Developmental English course fits into the bureaucracy of the community college and the field of education in general. In particular, the issue of policy literacy became clear as I read across the data. Policy literacy, like academic literacy, is a skill. It can be practiced, honed, and developed, but more often than not it is inherited.

Remediation may deter some students from persisting. In Joey’s case, college remediation is directly related to his attrition. Because remediation affects a student’s financial situation as well as their timeline for graduation and entering the workforce, remediation may be recognized as a logical cause for student attrition. Both Meryem and Patrick mention the practical reality of cost as it is associated with their developmental coursework, though they are able to lean on financial aid in other forms than loans, which could explain why they both completed their developmental coursework and persisted at the community college.

Remediation has an influence on the pedagogy and practice of instructors. Both Barbara and Melody relay that policies pertaining to remediation have a marked influence on their pedagogy and practice in developmental classrooms. Because the policies of remediation are often vague, instructors have to interpret them and exercise caution and intuition in the developmental writing class. It often places constraints on classroom management, pedagogy, and assessment. Since most developmental courses are graded on a pass-fail basis, instructors may have difficulty incentivizing participation or performance—something that is already

difficult given the fact that students may believe that their status in the class is something akin to treading water rather than making progress.

Developmental English students struggle to understand financial aid at the community college. While both Barbara and Melody have made careers out of teaching developmental English coursework, both indicate that they understand little of the detail or particularities of college finance, specifically financial aid and how it affects developmental students. Both were able to speak to the impacts such services have on their students—both good and bad—but they are largely unfamiliar with the language of financial aid, specific award types, and the terms and conditions associated with them.

Policy illiteracy affects both students and instructors. Both instructors and students struggle with policy literacy. From the data presented in chapter four, it is clear that neither Joey, Meryem, nor Patrick truly understood the conditions of their aid awards, their status as developmental students, or the impacts and opportunities associated with either. Similarly, Barbara and Melody are frank and open about their misunderstandings of everything from financial aid policy to the grading policies of the classes they are required to teach.

It is easy to place blame on either party here. On one hand, students should get informed and self-advocate when they are worried about the status of their enrollment. At the same time, it is easy to anticipate arguments offering that students are learning how to go to college as they go to college, and it is the instructors who should help to clarify these complex policies.

Implications for Students

In the following sections, I present the implications of policy and policy (il)literacy on the developmental English classroom. Particular attention is paid to those moments that span

across the cases, reference issues associated with identity, or represent the intersection of administrative bureaucracy and student experience.

Pierre Bourdieu's notions of habitus and cultural capital represent those social structures that reproduce class and social inequities. In contrast, higher education—and especially the community college—aims to democratize access and encourage social mobility. While the colleges themselves may represent such egalitarian impulses, the skills necessary for navigating them are often inherited in the form of embodied social capital, passed down from parents. The schools themselves do little to coach students through the administrative, logistical, and bureaucratic processes. Thus, it may be reasonable to argue that community colleges serve both democratizing and diversionary ends. They encourage access but may have the opposite impact (Dougherty, 1994).

The implications are dire. While many educators aim to produce democratizing educational experiences through the distribution of knowledge, encouraging student autonomy, and supporting critical analysis, few understand the logistical steps necessary for stepping foot in their classroom in the first place. It may be argued that this first type of access is superficial, missing the real obstacles to access in higher education, such as finance and admission (Scherer & Anson, 2014). What ensues is an absurd irony. Instructors, whose specialization is in their academic content and perhaps pedagogy, rarely have the requisite information necessary for giving their students good advice on navigating the policy structures of the community college, and developmental writing students—who are mostly uncomfortable on campus—often seek this advice only from their developmental instructors.

I have observed multiple examples of policy illiteracy in these five sets of interviews. In general, students struggle to understand the meaning, value, and implications of developmental

English. Few understand why they were placed into developmental coursework in the first place. They rarely understand how their financial aid is distributed and under which conditions they have borrowed. They rarely understand commensuration policies, and so are unaware of the fact that they are enrolled in a course for which they are not earning credit. Finally, they rely on assistance and advice from faculty and staff whom they are most comfortable, though they may not be the most knowledgeable.

Status and enrollment. The fact that so many developmental readers and writers do not even know they are enrolled in developmental coursework has deep implications. For one, it has practical implications in that it costs money, exhausts financial aid, and delays graduation. While it is possible to compensate for lost time by enrolling in intersession classes, one might reasonably assume that students who do not recognize that they are enrolled in pre-college coursework will not be the first to enroll in summer or winter classes.

This issue was present in each of the student cases. Joey does not have a concrete understanding of how many classes he's taken, how many credits he's earned, or what his academic standing is. Meryem recognizes that she is enrolled in developmental coursework, though she is unsure of whether or not she is earning credits, and Patrick—without ever taking a placement exam—is unaware of how he placed into developmental writing in the first place.

This makes planning for the future difficult. Students cannot develop accurate programs plans or anticipate their graduation dates without a better understanding of how remediation impacts their college enrollment status. It is interesting to report that only one of the participants, Joey, expressed frustration or emotional distress about his status as developmental reader. Both Meryem and Patrick express feeling grateful for the classes. It is important recognize, however, that Joey expressed the most concern about the cost of college and was the only participant to

pay for college with student loans. It may be reasonable to argue then that students with loans, provided that they are aware of their loans, may be more sensitive to frustration—and ultimately susceptible to higher rates of attrition—in the developmental English class.

Aid eligibility & distribution. My student participants had only a hazy understanding of the financial implications of their developmental courses. Joey is unaware of which loans he is paying off and what they are for. Meryem, until our interview, wasn't sure if she had taken out loans or grants, and Patrick only understands that the GI Bill pays for his tuition, though he is aware that it will eventually run out.

The obfuscation of financial aid policies has serious implications, especially since each of my participants expressed a utilitarian understanding of college and voiced concerns about its cost. Joey says that community college is the best way to do college “right” and views the four-year school and the experience of living on campus as a waste of money. Meryem aspires for her doctorate, and she indicates that attending the community college now is a part of her plan to pursue her doctorate. Patrick understands that his VA funding will eventually evaporate and worries about paying on the backside of his degree if developmental courses eat into his awards.

Both Barbara and Melody report a lack of understanding concerning college cost amongst their developmental students. As Melody cites, many students are completely unaware of how much they owe, and it is often only the students who sit for academic dismissal hearings who are forced to confront their mounting debt. Meryem recognized this during our interview. She said, “now that I think of it, I’m like, ‘where does that money come from?’” Given the fact that many community college students are what Mina Shaughnessy (1977) called education’s outsiders, they are preoccupied with integrating into the culture of higher education, while also doing their best to perform at the collegiate academic level.

Thus, it is naïve, and perhaps even irresponsible, to expect developmental students to also become financial literate. It is a lot to ask of incoming freshmen, and given the fact that Joey dropped out after multiple enrollments in developmental courses, while Meryem and Patrick are only first semester students, the stress and frustration from college cost, school finance, and financial aid policies may explain the abnormally high rates of attrition amongst developmental readers and writers.

Credit commensuration. Barbara and Melody express that most of their developmental students do not understand that their courses are accredited only for the office of financial aid and registrar—which qualifies them as full-time students—but not for their academic programs. The student participants in my study, however, seemed to understand. This may have been an anomaly, or it might be reasonable to infer that the students who volunteer to participate in this study are the same students who would be aware of their credits.

Where students seek advice. While the participants may understand that their developmental courses do not yield credit points, they struggle with other more obscure aspects of the bureaucracy of community college, and it is reasonable to infer that this has implications on their experience in the classroom. Since many developmental writers have little experience in higher education and navigating the college’s administrative offices, they seek advice and guidance from the places they are most comfortable. Meryem seeks advice from her developmental writing instructor, and the VA Resource center handles Patrick’s questions.

While this is not a problem in and of itself—it is good that students are seeking help somewhere—it might represent a problem because neither the VA Resource center nor the developmental writing instructor have the knowledge necessary for solving the complex issues that come from pairing college remediation with administrative policy.

Implications for Faculty

Writing instructors live their professional lives in local contexts. They work directly with students and see them as autonomous individuals with unique traits, skills, and needs. They listen to their stories, read their writing, and speak directly to them. This demands time, attention, and patience wherein instructors might lose perspective of global contexts. This, in and of itself, is not necessarily a bad thing. When you walk into a writing classroom, it is easy to forget the bureaucracy beneath the surface, the network of administrative policies, programs, and procedures that enrolled those students, processed their credits, lobbied for their funding, and scheduled their classes, but while it is easy to understand how students might think of their financial aid as “magic money,” instructors also rarely understand the mechanisms that place their students into their classes.

This is the proverbial problem of attempting to see *both* the forest *and* the trees. Instructors are so close to their students that they often do not have the perspective necessary for understanding their students in global contexts. It may even be reasonable to argue that people who become writing instructors do so because they have an aptitude for isolating local contexts, for seeing students simply as students. The implication, however, is that many writing instructors, and especially developmental writing instructors may be missing information necessary for doing their job to the best of their ability.

This dissertation sought to answer the following question: How do administrative and financial policies at community colleges impact students experience and instructor experience in the developmental English classroom? Embedded in this question is an implicit call for attention to both local—personal and pedagogical needs of the students—contexts and global contexts—the policies, politics, and economics surrounding the developmental English course and the

community college as a whole. While policy literacy is part of this discussion, the impacts of global contexts on local contexts—when policy affects pedagogy, assessment strategies, advisement or classroom management—also warrants discussion. I do not mean to simply state that instructors are wholly ignorant of political contexts, but rather that the data I discussed in chapter four and five implies that instructors prioritize their roles as instructors and mentors, though they sometimes lack the requisite information and expertise to facilitate this duty well.

In this section, I discuss the implications of my research as it pertains to three general themes: 1) the many roles developmental English instructors are required to perform, 2) policy literacies as they pertain to commensuration, assessment, and students' academic status, and 3) the general practice of hiring staffing developmental writing classes with adjunct faculty. It is my belief that the tension between the global and local contexts is fertile ground for developing programs, curricula, and professional training to better equip developmental writing instructors with the tools necessary for facilitating dialogue between classroom experience and policy experience.

The many roles of developmental English faculty and their implications. Both Barbara and Meryem indicate that they are required to complete many tasks outside of their job descriptions while teaching developmental English courses. They often find themselves playing the role of financial advisor, academic counselor, and perhaps even talk-therapist when their students come to class with concerns beyond their academic performance. While it is expected that an instructor may take on the informal role of mentor or advisor, many of these disciplines require specialized knowledge and policy literacies, which many instructors neither have the time to pursue or aptitude to address.

Meryem explicitly states that she gets advice on financial aid and from her developmental writing instructor. While her instructor's advice is typically just to send them to the office of financial aid anyway, the implication here is that instructors are being tasked with the role of facilitating a student's experience at the college with various administrative offices. This, is not in and of itself a problem, but as Barbara reminds me in our interview, most of these classes are taught by adjuncts, and adjuncts are not present as much as full-time faculty, nor are they privy to the same institutional knowledge. They do not sit on committees, rarely have correspondence with other departments and offices, and have fewer professional relationships with staff on campus. I believe it is reasonable to state that in my observations and basing this judgment in the stories relayed by Barbara and Melody, developmental writing instructors are often tasked with jobs they are often underprepared to complete effectively.

Developmental English, assessment, and implications. Best practices for assessment in developmental reading and writing are consistently in debate. As of today, many community colleges adopt the protocol of a portfolio review. Such is the case at SPCC. In a developmental writing class with a standard portfolio review assessment, students produce 3 – 4 academic essays throughout the course of the semester and are asked to provide multiple revisions. In order to graduate out of developmental writing, the student must pass the class—which almost always means completing all written assignments to the instructor's satisfaction while maintaining the requisite seat time—and pass a blind portfolio review. The portfolio is comprised of the students best two or three essays, complete with multiple drafts, a cover letter to the reader, and any number of other small written tasks. The portfolio goes to a blind reader who grades it on a pass/fail basis and confers with the instructor. If they agree the student passes, the student passes.

If they disagree, a third reader comes in to break the tie. Their vote determines the student's grade.

In short, this means that the final grade, whether the student passes or fails, is out of the hands of the instructor. While this may be frustrating, Melody says that this allows her to participate in the class in the role of a "coach" rather than instructor. This, she believes, creates a relationship wherein students feel comfortable aligning themselves with their instructors, as they seek to pass assessment from a third party. This implies that these assessment policies might actually be an asset for developmental writing instructors, as they shed the role of evaluator. At the same time, Barbara explains that she has trouble giving meaningful feedback without letter grades, and her students have trouble interpreting their performance if her role is closer to one of a coach. Her strategy of "grading" her students' papers as "rough draft," "first draft," and "final draft" is simply an approximation of more traditional grading policies, which she hopes help communicate academic standing to her students.

This means that assessment practices under developmental writing course policies are open to interpretation. Many instructors still provide letter grades, even though they do not accumulate in a final letter grade for the class. The implication here is that this process, however it is implemented, is subjective, confusing, and often problematic. It varies from class-to-class, and students are often unsure of their standing or performance. Moreover, since many of these classes are taught by adjuncts, who have little contact with department chairs and program directors, instructors rarely understand the policies themselves, which makes their interpretations and assessment practices difficult to defend if they were to come under scrutiny.

Adjuncts and their implications. Adjunct labor is amongst the most popular and controversial topics in higher education today. Today, it is estimated that only 17 percent college

faculty are full-time tenured faculty (Birmingham, 2017 Feb). While outcomes for developmental coursework at community colleges are bleak, I do not believe that adjuncts are entirely to blame. My conversations with Barbara and Melody reveal that it is departmental policies like staffing based on seniority preference that leave teaching developmental English to adjuncts.

Both Barbara and Melody describe staffing policies based on faculty seniority. These practices appear to leave the most inexperienced instructors with the responsibility of teaching developmental writing. It is hard to blame the instructors who accept the appointment to teach developmental writing for lacking experience. It may be fair, however, to question the practices of department chairs and program directors as they staff more experienced instructors in upper-division and literature courses.

Similarly, and in addition to often lacking expertise in the pedagogy of developmental English, part-time faculty generally have less institutional awareness and procedural knowledge of the bureaucratic aspects of community colleges. Barbara argues that this information is probably expressed at staff meetings but recognizes that such meetings are rarely compensated, and so part-time faculty are not incentivized to attend. Beyond this, in my own experience as an adjunct lecturer, I can attest to having to seek these meetings out. They are generally only discussed amongst full-time faculty.

All of this implies that while adjunct faculty are often responsible for developmental writers in the sense that they facilitate their coursework, the reason for their struggles, which ultimately impacts the students' experience, may be more closely reflect the institutional policies and practices of the community college and the English department than the teaching ability, commitment, or integrity of the instructors. In a later section of this chapter, I provide policy

recommendations for both better staffing developmental coursework as well as better preparing first-year developmental writing instructors.

Understanding the Data with Field Theory

This project was conceived in part because of my interests in student experience and student identity. It is based in the belief that student identity is influenced not only by direct contact with classmates and faculty, but also forged through the structural processes of institutional offices. In particular I've considered the implications of remediation policies on student identity.

Most obviously remediation represents a form of stigma (Shor, 1990), (Rose, 1987)—which Erving Goffman called a “spoiled identity” (1963). While I maintain the belief that these programs siphon students off from baccalaureate degrees, in my discussions with the three student participants, they did not discuss spoiled identity or stigmatization. Rather they each found unique ways to process their identities and distance themselves from their status at the college. Remediation, however still had an influence in the ways in which it positioned students in the college, with various administrative offices.

For instance, Joey was unable to enroll in courses that required freshman writing as a pre-requisite. Meryem's graduation will be delayed unless she enrolls in intersession classes, which she understands will conflict with her goals of getting her driver's license and finding a job. Finally, Patrick is exhausting his finite award appropriations. If he continues on to pursue the baccalaureate degree he describes, there is a chance that he will be stuck with an unexpected bill in his graduating semester.

Reading my data through Bourdieu's Field Theory highlighted the relationships these students had with their instructors, their classmates but also with administrative offices like

financial aid or the VA Resource center. It is my belief that these latter relationships function to habituate students into acting according to their prescribed positions in the field of higher education.

In each of the cases, my participants discussed the relationships between the external forces and structures that have molded them into the shape of their current positions. Of the three cases, only Joey rejected that prescription by dropping out of school, though he was well aware of the social, cultural, and symbolic capital he was losing to maintain what he believed was his integrity.

Suggestions and Recommendations for Future Research

While I did my best to approach the question of how community college students and faculty experience policy implementation in the developmental English class, I am left with more questions than answers. In this brief section, I offer some final thoughts, lingering questions, and unresolved issues, which I believe provide fertile ground for future research in pedagogy, policy, and student support services.

First and foremost, I suggest a qualitative approach to policy design and policy analysis with respect to developmental English courses. While policy design is necessarily linked to global, political, and economic contexts, it cannot ignore the reality of local student experience. If we learn anything from examples like San Jose State University's failed experiment with affordable, accessible, remote learning for developmental students, it should be that policies and programs can be designed with the best intentions, have the most promise, and appear to be the best option, but if it not conceived with attention to student experience, it is doomed to fail.

What appears to have worked for Meryem and Patrick is the sense of community, camaraderie, and autonomous identity afforded to them by their respective support services.

While unique to the programs in which these students participated, I believe more research into learning communities may provide more meaningful information for the dialogue about developmental student retention.

In general, I recognized a dearth of research on military and veteran students enrolled in developmental coursework. While there is significant data on adult learners in developmental coursework, this research misses the additional aspect of military service as a part of the student's identity. The field would benefit from more specialized research on military and veteran students enrolled in developmental coursework—particularly in English, where many assignments promote reflection, self-analysis, and autobiographical writing.

There is a marked need for more research on part-time instructors and policy literacy. While I was completing my study, I searched for information on policy and financial literacy at community colleges and found nothing more than studies exploring the financial literacies of first-generation college students and loan borrowers (Furquim, Glasener, Oster, McCall, & DesJardins, 2017). We need more research on this topic, but it needs to approach the perspective of faculty, too. In particular part-time faculty, who teach at multiple schools need to be considered, as they have the most direct contact with developmental English students.

Similarly, I suggest training programs and professional development workshops aimed at promoting institutional and financial literacy for part-time faculty. Given the fact that part-time faculty are historically underpaid, these workshops should be compensated with a stipend, so as to incentivize more participation. These trainings and workshops should discuss the socio-economic make-up of the school as well as provide contacts to representatives from various student support services.

Summary

This study began with the following question: How do community college students and instructors experience policy implementation in the developmental English class? As I developed the project, I drew from the quantitative research of policy analysis, which quickly became an important context for the qualitative work I was conducting in this study. It became clear that the relational sociology of Pierre Bourdieu's Field Theory would function as a generative framework and methodology, as it considers how structures like remediation or the community college might position students—as agents—in larger fields of power, such as the fields of higher education, higher education policy, or professional and vocational workplaces.

Bourdieu's work also has the unique ability to bring together global contexts and localized experiences. For this study, this aspect was critical. As I noted several times throughout this dissertation, there is plenty of good research available on the ways in which community colleges struggle with student retention, especially amongst developmental populations. What appears to be missing, however, is qualitative research on this topic.

My qualitative analysis focused primarily on how students experienced and exchanged various forms of social, cultural, and symbolic capital. In particular embodied social and cultural capital took form in the shape of policy literacy, wherein my participants were able to navigate complexities and bureaucracies at the community college with varying skill and comfort.

The decision to work through Bourdieu's relational Field Theory anchored the data to larger fields of power, such as the higher education policy arena. As I spoke with my participants, both students and instructors, I was able to consider their offerings amongst the larger context of these fields of power and understand how sites like the community college and programs and policies such as remediation and financial aid protocol functioned as structures within those fields of power.

These structures within those fields may function either to reproduce injustices and inequalities or challenge them. In this study, I highlight the moments where structures like remediation and complicated financial aid policies or obscure admissions policies might divert otherwise eligible students from the community college.

Conclusion

The Watkins Glen Raceway opens the first weekend in April. It has been a long time since I've been back to a racetrack with my father, but as I am writing this concluding chapter it is late March, and I am starting to think it would be nice to go back.

When I was younger, I was simply mesmerized by the speed and the sounds of those cars. Today, I think I'll look at them a little differently. From this study, I've learned to look for the relationships, and I understand that the race rules only matter in so far as a driver understands them or by the ways one might interpret them. As I reflect on this study, I can't help but think about the stories my participants told in a similar way. They told me stories about how they fought their way into college against what seemed to be all odds. They had to make judgments based off of the information they had and to the best of their abilities.

This study questioned whether or not we can adjust those rules, or better time the lights, so that students and faculty at community colleges have the information they need to make the best decisions they can. I don't think that this is too much to ask. It simply advocates for leveling the playing field, for distributing access to the skills necessary for making good decisions more equitably.

Today, there are several political initiatives aimed at doing exactly this. The State of California's Senate Bill 405 is a step in the right direction. Under SB405, students relegated to

developmental coursework in Californian community colleges cannot legally be held to anything longer than one year of pre-freshman non-credit bearing coursework.

Many of my colleagues view this as a first step in phasing out college remediation. While I agree that such an initiative has great potential, it will bring with it new and complex challenges for those enrolled in, and those who teach, developmental English at community colleges. It is my hope that this dissertation offers some assistance in better conducting research on these populations and some guidance in designing empathetic programs to meet both the shifting contexts of the higher education policy arena and the evolving needs of underrepresented college students.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview with Current Students 1

- 1) Tell me a little about yourself as a student, as a writer.
- 2) What made you choose SPCC?
- 3) Tell me about the placement exam.
- 4) How was your experience with high school English?
- 5) How was your experience registering? What was your experience with the office of financial aid?
- 6) How are you paying for college? How did you make that decision? Is that affected by developmental coursework?
- 7) What are you most worried about as you enter college and this course specifically?
- 8) How much contact did you have with the English department during your registration process? Did you have any help?
- 9) Can you explain how developmental courses work at SPCC?
- 10) What do you expect from this class? What do you expect to get out of this class?

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview with Current Students 2

- 1) Tell me a little about the course. How did it go? How did you do?
- 2) Are you planning on returning to SPCC next semester?
- 3) What course will you be taking?
- 4) How do you feel as you move into your next semester?
- 5) How will you be paying for next semester?
- 6) Is your financial aid affected by developmental credits? How?
- 7) How well would you say you understand developmental education at SPCC?
- 8) Are you glad you took this course?

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview with Former Students

- 1) What are you doing now?
- 2) How long ago were you enrolled in developmental English at SPCC?
- 3) What were your experiences in developmental English? Tell me about at time. What happened afterward?
- 4) Can you remember your biggest worries about college or developmental English?
- 5) Can you remember what you were most excited about?
- 6) What were your interactions with the office of the registrar and the office of financial aid? Were you ever distracted or confused?
- 7) How did you pay for college? How did you make that decision?
- 8) Was college worth it? What about developmental English?

Appendix D

Semi-Structured Interview with Instructor

- 1) What is your average rate of persistence?
- 2) What do you credit for that?
- 3) How well would you say faculty understand the policies concerning remediation here?
- 4) What about students?
- 5) Do you have a sense of how students are paying for college?
- 6) What are your thoughts on the excelsior program? With regard to developmental programs?

Appendix E

Lived Experience Description (LED) Protocol

Prompt: Write about your experiences with remedial coursework at SPCC. Think not just about your courses, but also about the offices of admissions and financial aid, your placement examination, and how this program has, or hasn't, influenced your experiences at SPCC.

1. Think about the event chronologically.
2. Describe what you saw, who you interacted with, what was said, what was said to you, how you heard it, what you felt, what you thought.
3. Try to describe the experience like you are watching it on film
4. Try your best to describe the experience as you lived through it. Try to avoid causal explanations (this happened because...), generalizations (this typically happened because...), or abstract interpretations (I wonder if...).
5. Write in a straight forward manner. Try to avoid beautifying your account with overly descriptive phrasings.
6. If you want to use names in your descriptions, please assign each person a pseudonym.